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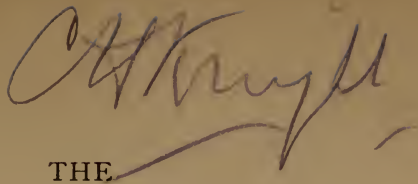
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THE MONKS OF THELEMA.



REPRINTED FROM THE "WORLD."



THE

MONKS OF THELEMA.

A Novel.

BY

WALTER BESANT AND JAMES RICE,

AUTHORS OF

"READY-MONEY MORTIBOY," "THE GOLDEN BUTTERFLY," "BY
CELIA'S ARBOUR," "THIS SON OF VULCAN," "MY LITTLE
GIRL," "THE CASE OF MR. LUCRAFT," "WITH HARP
AND CROWN," "WHEN THE SHIP COMES
HOME," ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

London:

CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY.

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THE MONKS OF THELEMA.

CHAPTER I.

“ Here dwell no frowns nor anger ; from these gates
Sorrow flies afar.”

Two novices are waiting for the ceremony of reception. They have been placed side by side upon a seat at the lower end of the great hall, and have been enjoined to wait in silent meditation. The low seat perhaps typifies the stool of repentance ; but until the reception is over one hardly likes to speculate on the meaning of things. One of the novices is a man, and the other a girl. Two by two the fraternity have entered into this ark, and two by two they go out of it. So much only is known to the outer world. The man is about thirty years of age, with bright eyes, and smooth-

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shaven chin and cheek. If the light was better, you would make out that he has a humorous twinkle in his eyes, and that his lips, which are thin, have got a trick of smiling at nothing—at the memory, the anticipation, the mere imagined umbra of a good thing. This kind of second sight is useful for keeping the spirits at a uniform temperature, a simmering rather than a bubbling of cheerfulness. The unhappy people who have it not are melancholy in solitude, rush into any kind of company, often take to drink, commit atrocious crimes while drunk, and hang themselves in prison. Mr. Roger Exton will never, it is very certain, come to this melancholy end. He is extremely thin, and rather tall; also his face is brown, of that colour which comes of long residence in hot climates. In fact Mr. Exton has but recently returned from Assam, where he has made a fortune—which we hope is a large one—some say by tea, or, according to another school of thinkers, by indigo. The question, still unsettled, belongs to

those open controversies, like the authorship of "Junius," or the identity of the "Claimant," which vex the souls of historians and tap-room orators. The only other remarkable points about this novice were that his hair was quite straight, and that, although he was yet, as I have said, not much more than thirty, the corners of his eyes were already provided with a curious and multitudinous collection of crows' feet, the puckers, lines, spiders' webs, and map-like rills of which lent his face an incongruous expression, partly of surprise, partly of humour, partly of craft and subtlety. The rapid years of modern life, though his had been spent in the quiet of the North-west Provinces, had in his case, instead of tearing the hair off temples and top, or making him prematurely grey, as happens to some shepherds, marked him in this singular fashion.

The reasons why you cannot see things as clearly as I have described them are that it is past nine o'clock on an evening in July; that the hall is lighted chiefly by

upper windows which form a sort of clerestory ; that most of the glass is painted ; that what amber twilight of a summer evening can get in is caught in the black depths of a fifteenth century roof, across which stretches a whole forest of timber, a marvel of intricate beams ; or falls upon tapestry, carpets, and the dull canvas of portraits which swallow it all up. In the east, behind the pair who wait, is a rose window emblazoned with the arms and crest, repeated in every light, of the great House of Dunlop. Looking straight before them, the expectants could make out nothing at all except black shadows, which might mean instruments of torture. Half way up the wall there ran a row of tiny gas-jets, which had been lighted, but were now turned down to little points of blue flame, pretty to look at, but of no value as illuminators.

Over their heads was an organ-loft, in which sat a musician playing some soft and melodious sort of prelude. Of course there were lights in the organ-loft ; but

there was a curtain behind him, while in front the organ, cased in black woodwork of the last century, rich with precious carvings, was capable of absorbing, without reflection, all the light, whether from candles, gas, oxyhydrogen, electricity, or magnesium wire, which modern science might bring to play upon it. So that no good came out of the organ-loft lights.

The minutes passed by, but no one came to relieve their meditation and suspense. The soft music, the great dark hall, the strange light in the painted glass, the row of tiny gas-jets, the novelty of the situation, produced a feeling as if they were in a church where the organist's mind was running upon secular things, or else on the stage at the opera waiting for the procession to begin. An odd feeling—such a feeling as must have passed over the minds of a City congregation two centuries and a half ago, when their Puritan ministers took for Church use the tunes which once delighted a court, and therefore belonged to the Devil.

The girl heaved a sigh of suspense, and her companion, who had all this time looked straight before him without daring to break upon the silence, or to look at his partner in this momentous ceremony, looked round. This is what he would have seen had the light been stronger; as it was, the poor man had to content himself with a harmony in twilight.

She wore, being a young lady who paid the very greatest attention to the subject of dress, as every young lady, outside Girton and Merton, ever should do, some sweet-looking light evening dress, all cloudy with lace and trimmings, set about with every kind of needlework art, looped up, tied round, and adorned in the quaint and pretty fashion of the very last year of grace, eighteen hundred and seventy-five. She wore a moss-rose in her dark hair, and had a simple gold locket hanging round her neck by a light Indian chain. She is tall, and, as is evident from the pose of her figure, she is *gracieuse*; she is shapely of limb, as you can see from the white arm

which gleams in the twilight; she has delicately-cut features, in which the lips, as mobile as the tiny wavelets of a brook, dimple and curve at every passing emotion, like the pale lights of an electric battery; her eyes do most of her talking, and show all her moods—no hypocritical eyes are these—eyes which laugh and cry, are indignant, sorry, petulant, saucy, and pitiful, not in obedience to the will of their mistress whom they betray, but in accordance with some secret compact made with her heart. Give her a clear-cut nose, rather short than long; a dainty little coral of an ear, a chin rather pointed, and an oval face—you have, as a whole, a girl who in her face, her figure, the grace of her bearing, would pass for a French girl, and who yet in language and ideas was English. Her godfather called her Eleanor, which proved much too stately a name for her, and so her friends always call her Nelly. Her father, while he breathed these upper airs, was a soldier, and his name was Colonel Despard.

Taking courage from the sigh, Roger Exton tried to begin a little conversation.

"They keep us waiting an unconscionable time," he said. "Are you not tired?"

"This is the half-hour for meditation," she replied gravely. "You ought to be meditating."

"I am," he said, suppressing a strong desire to yawn. "I am meditating."

"Then please do not interrupt my meditations," she answered, with a little light of mischief in her eyes.

So he was silent again for a space.

"Do you happen to know," the man began again—men are always so impatient—"Do you happen to know what they will do to us in the ceremony of reception?"

"Tom—I mean, Mr. Caledon, refused to tell me anything about it, when I asked him."

"I hope," he said, fidgeting about, "that there will be no Masonic nonsense; if there is, I shall go back to the world."

"I presume," she said, "though I do not know anything about it, really—but I

expect that the Sisters will give us the kiss of fraternity, and that——”

“ If,” he interrupted her—“ If we have only got to kiss each other, it would be a ceremony much too simple to need all this mystery. After all, most mysteries wrap up something very elementary. They say the Masons have got nothing to give you but a word and a grip. The kiss of fraternity—that will be very charming.”

He looked as if he thought they might begin at once, before the others came ; but the girl made no reply, and just then the organ, which had dropped into a low whisper of melodious sound, which was rolling and rumbling among the rafters in the roof over their heads, suddenly crashed into a triumphant march. At the same moment, the long row of starlike flame-dots sprang into a brilliant illumination : the double doors at the lower end of the hall, at the side opposite to that where was placed the stool of repentance, were flung open, and a procession began, at the appearance of which both novices

sprang to their feet, as if they were in a church.

And then, too, the hall became visible with all its adornments.

It was a grand old hall which had once belonged to the original Abbey which Henry VIII. presented to the Dunlop who graced his reign. It was as large as the hall of Hampton Court ; it was lit by a row of windows high up, beneath which hung tapestry, by a large rose window in the east, and a great perpendicular window in the west. There was a gallery below the rose, and the organ was in a recess of *pratique* in the wall at the lower end. Along the wall at the upper, or western end, was a row of stalls in carved wood-work ; the wood was old, but the stalls were new. There were twenty in all, and over each hung a silken banner with a coat of arms. Each was approached by three steps, and each, with its canopy of carved wood, its seat and arms in carved wood, the gay banner above it, and the coat of arms painted and gilded at the back, might have

served for the Royal Chapel at Windsor. Between the windows and above the tapestry were trophies of arms, with antlers, and portraits. And on the north side stood the great fireplace, sunk back six feet and more in the wall; around it were more wood carvings, with shields, bunches of grapes, coats of arms in gold and purple, pilasters and pediments, a very precious piece of carving. There was a daïs along the western end; on this stood a throne, fitted with a canopy, and overlaid with purple velvet fringed with gold. On the right and left of the throne stood two chairs in crimson velvet, before each a table; and on one table were books. In the centre of the hall was another table covered with crimson velvet, in front of which was a long cushion as if for kneeling. In front of the candidates for reception was a bar covered with velvet of the same colour.

The novices took in these arrangements with hasty eyes, and then turned to the procession, which began to file slowly and with fitting solemnity over the polished floor

of the long hall. The organ pealed out the march from "Scipio."

"I haven't heard that," said the man, "since I was at Winchester, they used to play it when the judges came to church."

First there walked a row, in double file, of boys clad in purple surplices, with crimson hoods; they carried flowers in baskets. After them came twenty young men in long blue robes, tied round the waist with scarlet ropes; they carried books, which might have been music-books, and these were singing-men and serving-men. After them, at due intervals, came the Brethren and Sisters of the monastery.

There were eighteen in all, and they walked two by two, every Brother leading a Sister by the hand. The Sisters were dressed in white, and wore hoods; but the white dresses were of satin, decorated with all the splendours that needle and thimble can bestow, and the hoods were of crimson, hanging about their necks something like the scarlet hood of a Doctor of Divinity. If the white satin and the crim-

son hood were worn in obedience to the sumptuary customs of the Order, no sumptuary law prohibited such other decorations as might suggest themselves to the taste of the wearer. And there were such things in adornment as would require the pen of a poetical Worth to portray. For some wore diamond sprays, and some ruby necklaces, and others bracelets bright with the furtive smile of opals ; and there were flowers in their hair and in their dresses—long ropes of flowers trailing like living serpents over the contours of their figures, and adown the long train which a page carried for each. As the two novices gazed, there was a gleaming of white arms, and a brightness of sparkling eyes, an overshadowing sense of beauty, as if Venus Victrix for once was showing all that could be shown in grace and loveliness, which made the brain of one of these novices to reel, and his feet to stagger ; and the eyes of the other to dilate with longing and wonder.

“It is *too* beautiful,” she murmured.

“See, there is Tom, and he leads Miranda.”

They were all young and all beautiful, these nine women, except one who was neither young nor beautiful. She was certainly past forty, and might have been past fifty; she was portly in figure; she was dressed more simply than the rest of her Sisters, and she walked with an assumption of stately dignity; but her face was comely still and sweet in expression, though years had effaced the beauty of its lines. The Brother who led her—a young man who had a long silky brown beard and blue eyes—wore a grave and pre-occupied look, as if he was going to take a prominent part in the function, and was not certain of his part.

All the Brethren were young, none certainly over thirty; they were dressed alike in black velvet, of a fashion never seen except perhaps on the stage; and they, too, wore crimson hoods, and a cord of crimson round the waist.

Last came the Lady Abbess—the Mi-

randa of whom the novice had spoken. She was young, not more than one or two and twenty; she wore the white satin and the crimson hood, and in addition, she carried a heavy gold chain round her neck, with a jewel hanging from it on her bosom. She, too, by virtue of her office, advanced with much gravity and even solemnity, led by her cavalier. Two pages bore her train, and she was the last in the procession. The doors closed behind her, and a stalwart man clad in white leather and crimson sash stood before the door, sword in hand, as if to guard the meeting from interruption.

The Brethren and Sisters proceeded to their respective stalls; the elder Sister was led to the table on the right of the throne, the Brother who conducted her took his place at that on the left; two stewards ranged themselves beside the two tables, and took up white wands of office; the boys laid their flowers at the feet of every Sister, and then fell into place in rows below the stalls, while the Lady Miranda, led by that

Brother whom the novice irreverently called Tom, mounted the throne and looked around. Then she touched a bell, and the armed janitor, laying down his sword, struck a gong once. The echoes of the gong went rolling and booming among the rafters of the roof, and had not died away before the organ once more began. It was the opening hymn appointed to be sung on the reception of a pair of novices.

“You who would take our simple vows,
Which cause no sorrow after,
Bring with you to this holy house,
No gifts, but joy and laughter.

“Outside the gate, where worldlings wait,
Leave envies, cares, and malice,
And at our feast, with kindly breast,
Drink love from wisdom’s chalice.

“No lying face, no scandal base,
No whispering tongue is found here ;
But maid and swain with golden chain
Of kindness are bound here.

“To charm with mirth, with wit and worth,
My Sister, is thy duty ;
Bring thou thy share of this good fare,
Set round with grace and beauty.

- “ And thine, O Brother? Ask thy heart
Its best response to render ;
And in the fray of wit and play,
And in the throng of dance and song,
Or when we walk in sober talk,
No borrower be, but lender.
- “ Stay, both, or go : free are ye still,
So that ye rest contented ;
No Sister stays against her will,
Though none goes unlamented.
- “ And, last, to show where here below
True wisdom’s only ease is,
Read evermore, above our door,
‘ Here each does what he pleases.’ ”

The first four lines were sung as a solo by a sweet-voiced boy—the first treble, in fact, in the Cathedral choir three or four miles away. The rest was sung as a four-part song by the full choir, which was largely recruited from the Cathedral, not altogether with the sanction of the chapter. But receptions were rare.

When the organ began its prelude, two of the attendants with white wands advanced side by side and bowed before the novices, inviting them to step forward. The man, whose face betokened entire ap-

proval so far of the ceremonies, offered his hand to the girl, and with as much dignity as plain evening dress allows, which was, he felt, nothing compared with the dignity conferred by the costume of the Brothers, led the new Sister within the bar to the place indicated by the stewards, namely, the small altar-like table.

Then they listened while the choir sang the hymn. The Brothers and Sisters were standing each in their stall; the Lady Superior was standing under her canopy. It was like a religious ceremony.

When the last notes died away, the Lady Superior spoke softly, addressing the Brother at the low table on her left.

“Our orator,” she said, “will charge the novices.”

The Brother, who was the man with the blue eyes and brown beard, bowed, and stepped to the right of the throne.

“Brethren and Sisters,” said the Lady Abbess, “be seated.”

“It is our duty,” began the orator, “at the reception of every new novice, to set

forth the reasons for our existence and the apology for our rites. Listen. We were founded four hundred years ago by a monk of great celebrity and renown, Brother Jean des Entommeures. The code of laws which he laid down for the newly established Order of Thelemites is still maintained among us, with certain small deviations, due to change in fashion, not in principle. In externals only have we ventured to make any alterations. The rules of the Order are few. Thus, whereas in all other monasteries and convents, everything is done by strict rule, and at certain times, we, for our part, have no bells, no clocks, and no rules of daily life. The only bell heard within this convent is that cheerful gong with which we announce the serving of dinner in the refectory. Again, whereas all other monasteries are walled in and kept secluded, our illustrious founder would have no wall around his Abbey; and, whereas it was formerly the custom to shut up in the convents those who, by reason of their lacking wit, comeliness,

courage, health, or beauty, were of no use in the outer world, so it was ordered by the founder that to the Abbey of Thelema none should be admitted but such women as were fair and of sweet disposition, nor any man but such as was well-conditioned and of good manners. And again, whereas in other convents some are for men and some for women, in this Abbey of Thelema men and women should be admitted to dwell together, in such honourable and seemly wise as befits gentlemen and gentlewomen; and if there were no men, there should be no women. And, as regards the three vows taken by monks and nuns of religion, those assumed by this new fraternity should be also three, but that they should be vows of permission to marry, to be rich, if the Lord will, and to live at liberty.

“These, with other minor points, were the guiding principles of the Thelemites of old, as they are those of our modern Order. It is presumed from the silence

of history, that the Abbey founded by Brother Jean des Entommeures fell a prey to the troubles which shortly after befell France. The original Abbey perished, leaving the germs and seeds of its principles lying in the hearts of a few. We do not claim an unbroken succession of abbots and abbesses ; but we maintain that the ideas first originated with our founder have never died.

“ Here you will find ” — the orator’s voice deepened — “ none of the greater or the lesser enemies to culture and society. The common bawling Cad will not be more rigorously exiled from our house than that creeping caterpillar of society, who crawls his ignoble way upwards, destroying the tender leaves of reputation as he goes. The Pretender has never in any one of his numerous disguises, succeeded in forcing an entrance here. By her Ithuriel wand, the Lady Miranda, our Abbess, detects such, and waves them away. The fair fame of ladies and the honour of men are not defamed by

our Brethren. We have no care to climb higher up the social scale. We have no care to fight for more money, and soil our hands with those who wrestle in the dusty arena. We do not fill our halls with lions and those who roar. We are content to admire great men, travellers, authors, and poets, at a distance, where, steeped in the mists of imagination, we think they look larger. We do not wrangle over religion or expect a new gospel whenever a new magazine is started, whenever a new preacher catches the town ear, and whenever a new poet strikes an unaccustomed strain. And we are thankful for what we get.

“Newly-elected Sister! newly-elected Brother! know that you have been long watched and carefully considered before we took upon ourselves the responsibility of your election. You did not seek election, it was conferred upon you; you did not ask, it was given. We have found in you sympathy with others, modesty in self-assertion, good breeding, and a sufficiency

of culture. We have found that you can be happy if you are in the atmosphere of happiness ; that you can be *spirituels* without being cynical, that you are fonder of bestowing praise than censure, that you love not downcriers, enviers, and back-biters, that you can leave for a time the outer world, put aside such ambitions as you have, and while you are here live the life of a grown-up child. We welcome you."

He descended from the throne, and advancing to the table offered his hand to the young lady.

"Eleanor Despard," he said, "at this bar you leave your name and assume another to be known only within our walls. Brethren and Sisters of Thelema, you know this novice ; give her a name."

The Sister at the right of the throne—the one who was no longer young—called a steward, who took cards in a salver from her and distributed them among the fraternity. There was a little whispering and laughing, but when the steward went round to collect the cards, they were all filled up.

The list of proposed names was various. One wrote Atalanta, and there was laughter and applause, and Nelly looked surprised. Another wrote Maud, "because there is none like her;" then Nelly looked at the Brother whom she had called Tom, and smiled. Another proposed Haydee; but when Sister Desdemona read out the name of Rosalind, there was a general acclamation, and it was clear what her name was to be. The officiating Brother led her to the Abbess. She mounted the three steps and knelt before the throne, while the Abbess bent over her, took her hands in her own, and kissed her lips and forehead.

"Rise, Sister Rosalind," she said, "be welcome to our love and sisterhood."

Then Sister Desdemona beckoned another steward, who came forward bearing a train and crimson hood.

"Sister Rosalind," said the elderly Sister, "I am the registrar of the convent. You must sign your name in our book, and subscribe our vows. They are, as you have heard, three.

“First, ‘I declare that I make no vow against the honourable and desirable condition of wedlock; that I will not defame the sweet name of love, and that I will never pledge myself to live alone.’”

Sister Rosalind blushed prettily and signed this vow, the light dancing in her eyes.

“The second vow is this: ‘Seeing that riches give delight to life, and procure the means of culture and joy, I vow to take joyfully whatever wealth the Heavens may send.’”

Rosalind made no objection to signing this vow also.

“The third and last vow is as follows: ‘I will be bound while in this place by no conventional rules; in the Abbey of Thelema I vow to live as I please. What honour and gentlehood permit, that will I do or say.’”

Rosalind signed the third.

Then Desdemona produced a box.

“In this box,” she said, “is the ring of fraternity. I put it on the third finger of

your left hand. Here also is the collar of the Order; I place it round your neck. Upon your shoulders I hang the mantle and the hood; around your waist I tie the crimson cord of our fraternity. Kiss me, my Sister; we are henceforth bound together by the vows of Thelema."

Thus equipped, Sister Rosalind again took the hand of her leader, and was by him presented solemnly to each Sister in turn, receiving from each the kiss of welcome.

"This is a splendid beginning," said the other novice to himself, standing at the bar alone; "I wish my turn were come."

The Brothers did not, however, he noticed with sorrow, salute their new Sister on the lips, but on the hand.

The presentation finished, the Brother led Sister Rosalind to her stall, over which hung, as over a stall in St. George's Chapel, the silken banner wrought with her coat of arms and crest; and behind the throne two trumpeters blared out a triumphant roar of welcome.

Then it was the turn of the other.

The orator went through the same ceremony. First the stewards sent round the cards, and names were suggested.

There were several. One said Brother Panurge, and another Brother Shandy, and another Brother Touchstone; and the one on which they finally agreed was Brother Peregrine.

Contrary to reasonable expectation, the newly-elected Brother Peregrine was not saluted on the lips by the Abbess or by any of the Sisters. As a substitution of that part of the ceremonial, he received a hand of each to kiss, and then the trumpeters blew another blast of welcome.

Just then the organ began again playing softly, like music in a melodrama, while the orator again stood beside the throne, and prepared to speak.

“Brothers and Sisters,” he said, “we have this evening admitted two more, a man and a woman, to share our pleasures and our sports. Be kind to them; be considerate of their weaknesses; make your-

selves loved by them ; encourage them in the cultivation of the arts which make our modern Thelema worthy of its illustrious founder, those, namely, of thought for the joy of others, innocent pleasure in the delights which we can offer, and ingenious devices of sport and play. And all of us remember, that as the Egyptians, so we have our skeleton."

He pointed to the throne. A steward drew back a curtain, and showed, sitting on the same seat as the Abbess, a skeleton crowned, and with a sceptre in its hand.

"We have this always with us. It saddens joys which else might become a rapture ; it sobers mirth which else might pass all bounds ; it bids us live while we may. Brethren and Sisters, at each reception this curtain is drawn aside, to remind us of what we may not forget, but do not speak. Lady Abbess, I have spoken."

He bowed low and retired.

The Abbess rose slowly. Her white satin, her crimson mantle, her lace, the bright cord round her waist, the spray

of diamonds in her hair, her own bright eyes, and sweet grave face, contrasted against the white and crouching skeleton beside her.

“My Brothers and Sisters,” she said, “there remains but one thing more ; you have heard that our founder was the illustrious Friar Jean des Entommeures. It is true ; but the *creator* of that monk, the real designer of our Abbey, was a far greater man. Let us drink in solemn silence to the memory of the Master.” One of the stewards bore a golden cup to every Brother and Sister, and another filled it with champagne.

Then the organ pealed and the trumpets brayed, and as the Abbess bowed from the throne, an electric light fell full upon a marble bust which Rosalind had not seen before. It was on a marble pillar at the end of the hall. It was the bust of the great Master—François Rabelais himself—and beneath it were the words in golden letters,

“FAY CE QUE VOULDRAS.”



CHAPTER II.

“These delights if thou canst give,
Mirth, with thee I mean to live.”

AFTER the reception, it was only natural that a ball should follow. By the time the first guests arrived the throne had been carried away; the crowned skeleton was removed to the place where such mementoes should be—a cupboard. All the properties of the recent ceremony—the red velvet bar, the tables and carpets, had been put away out of sight. Only the stalls remained, with their beautiful carved work in wood, and these were stripped of cushions, crimson carpets, and banners. The hall, save for the rout-stools, was absolutely empty; the organ-loft was dark, and the band were collected in the music-gallery,

which ran along the east end of the hall, waiting for the dancing to begin.

There was no one to receive people ; because none of the Order were present. But when a thin gathering of guests had arrived, the band struck up the opening quadrille.

It was not a large ball, because the number of possible *invités* was limited. Given a country place, four or five miles from a small Cathedral town, in a district where properties are large and owners few ; given the season of mid-July, the possibilities of selection do not look promising. There was, however, the Vicar, with his wife and three daughters. This particular Vicar, unlike many of his reverend brethren, did not regard social gatherings, when young people dance, as a Witches' Sabbath of the Black Forest. He had in his early manhood perpetrated a play, which had been actually brought out, and which ran successfully for five-and-twenty nights, once a fair run. He had the courage to justify this wickedness by always going to the theatre when he went up to London, and by attend-

ing, officially as the Vicar of Weyland, whatever was going on in the country. "Why should a man," he was wont to say, "who has taken orders, pretend to give up one of the joys of the world, and keep the rest? Why should he go to a dinner and decline a dance? Why should he listen to a concert, and refuse to listen to an opera? Why should he read novels, and refuse to see plays?" As a matter of fact he wrote novels himself, under an assumed name. Does he not enjoy a feast still, in spite of his stiff collar? He was still ready, himself, for any amount of feasting. Does he not laugh at a joke? He himself laughed much, and made many jokes. He spoke good common sense; but I do not desire to see the black brigade in theatres, because the step is short from taking a part among the audience, to taking a part in the management, and then to claiming the whole share, so that one shudders to think what the stage might come to. The Vicar's daughters were pretty; they dressed in simple white frocks, with bright-coloured ribbons; and enjoyed all that could be got in their quiet

and innocent lives. Above all they enjoyed an evening like this, when to a delightful dance was added the joy of seeing the latest freak of the Thelema fraternity. There was a Canon of the neighbouring Cathedral of Athelston, which furnished, besides, a good proportion of the guests. The Canon had a daughter who was æsthetic, dressed in neutral tints, parted her hair on the side, and corrected her neighbours in a low voice when they committed barbarities in art. She was not pretty, but she was full of soul, and she longed to be invited to join the Order. Then there were half a dozen officers from the depot twenty miles away, and such contributions as the neighbouring county houses could furnish.

“At the last reception,” said Lucy Corington, the vicar’s eldest daughter, to her partner, “when they elected Sister Cecilia—Adela Fairfax, you know—they all wore the costumes of Henry the Eighth. No one ever knows beforehand how they will dress.”

“Are you going to join the Order, Lucy?” asked her partner.

Lucy shook her pretty head.

“No! Papa would not like it. We are quiet people, and poor people too. We only look on and applaud. They have made the place very lively for us all; we are grateful, and hope it will last. You will persuade your son to keep it up, won't you, Lord Alwyne?”

“As if I had any influence over Alan,” said his father, who was indeed Lucy's partner.

Lord Alwyne Fontaine was the fourth son of the fourth Duke of Brecknock. The red book told everybody what he could not believe, and yet could not deny—that he was fifty-five years of age. How could he be fifty-five? It was incredible. He was a man of moderate height, rather thin, and he had a face still youthful. His hair had gone off his temples, and was more than a little thin on the top. But these accidents happen to quite young fellows, say of forty, and are not at all to be taken as signs of age.

His expression was uniformly one of great good humour and content, that of a man who had experienced no troubles, managed the conduct of life without excess, and yet with no solution in the continuity of pleasure, who had not hardened his heart by enjoyments purely selfish, and who still at five-and-fifty looked around him with as keen an eye as thirty years before ; who was ready to enjoy life, and to enjoy it in the same way as when he began his career. No one ever found Lord Alwyne bored, out of temper, or *blasé*. No one ever heard him complain. No one ever heard him pour out the malicious theories in which some of his contemporaries rejoiced ; he possessed those most inestimable qualities for a man of wealth, contentment of mind, a good heart, and an excellent digestion.

“ I have not seen Alan yet,” he went on. “ In fact I came down chiefly by invitation of Nelly Despard. She wanted me to see her in all her grandeur. When do they come in ?”

“ Directly,” said Lucy. “ They are

never much later than half-past ten. Will not Nelly look beautiful? Here they come!"

In fact, as the clock struck half-past ten, the band, which had just finished a quadrille, burst out into a grand triumphal march; no other, in fact, than Liszt's "March of the Crusaders." The doors at the end of the hall were flung open, and the Monks and Sisters of Thelema entered in grand procession.

The guests ranged themselves in double line as the procession advanced, and when it reached the middle of the hall, they formed a circle round them. It was not quite the same procession as that of the reception. There were no choir boys or singing men; there were only two stewards. Sister Rosalind, the newly received, came first, after the stewards. She was dressed now, like all the rest, in white satin. She was led by Brother Lancelot, whom she had called Tom, after the manner of the world; and she bore herself bravely under the eyes of the multitude, who

laughed and clapped their hands. The costumes were the same as at the reception.

“Let us talk all the scandal we can about them all, Lucy,” whispered Lord Alwyne.

Lucy laughed.

“For shame! There is Nelly. Did you ever see any one look so charming as Nelly? To be sure, she is always perfectly lovely, with her bright eyes and her beautiful oval face.”

Lucy sighed in thinking of her own chubby cheeks and apple face, which she was disposed to deprecate at sight of Nelly's more unusual style of beauty.

“See, that is the collar of the Order which she wears round her neck; and that crimson cord round her waist is the girdle of the Order. They have christened her Sister Rosalind. You know their motto, do you not? ‘Fay ce que voudras’—Do what you please. What a motto for a nun! And then, you know Tom Caledon, who leads her by the hand. Poor Tom!

They call him Brother Lancelot in the Abbey. Everybody knows that he is desperately in love with Nelly, and she can't marry him, poor fellow, because he has no money, or not enough. Everybody is sorry for Tom."

"I dare say Tom will grow out of it," said the man of the world. "Love is a passion which improves with age—loses its fiery character, and grows mellow."

Lucy looked as if she didn't believe that story, and went on :

"There is your son, Lord Alwyne, leading Sister Desdemona."

"I see him. What is Alan's name in relig—I mean in the Order?"

"They call him Brother Hamlet, I believe, because no one can understand what he will do next."

"A very good name. I am glad the boy has got fun enough in him to enjoy a little fooling. And I am very glad that he is taking care of Desdemona."

"Do you know her, Lord Alwyne?"

"I remember her coming out at the

Haymarket thirty years ago, in 'Othello.' She was Clairette Fanshawe. What a lovely Desdemona she made! And how the men went mad after her! Poor Clairette! She threw us all over, and married some fellow called Dubber, who lived on her salary, and, I believe, used to beat her. Four or five years later, her friends arranged a separation, and she retired from the stage. She has had a sad experience of life, poor Desdemona! Dubber succumbed to drink."

"She is the directress and designer of all their fêtes," Lucy went on. "She is indispensable. And they all do exactly what she orders. The next are Brother Mercutio and Sister Audrey. They are a handsome couple, and if they could only agree for an hour together, they would marry, I believe. But then they hold opposite opinions on every conceivable subject, and conduct two weekly papers, in which they advocate their own ideas. So that if they married they would have to give up the very chief pleasure of their lives—to wrangle with each other."

“Not at all, my dear child,” said Lord Alwyne, “not at all. Let me disabuse your mind of that fact. I have known many most excellent people, whose only pleasure after marriage was to quarrel with each other; and the more heartily the better.”

Lucy shook her head. She preferred her simple faith.

“There come Brother Benedick and Sister Romola. She is engaged, I believe, to a man in India, and he to his cousin who is an heiress; but I should not be surprised to learn—oh! this is dreadful girls’ chatter.”

“I like girls’ chatter,” said Lord Alwyne. “My son has got wisdom enough for the whole family. Go on, Lucy.”

“Well, then—but I will not give you all the idle gossip. In such a dull place as this, we talk about each other all the day. The next couple are Bayard and Cordelia. Bayard is a V.C.”

“I know him,” said Lord Alwyne.

“Then come Parolles and Silvia.

Brother Parolles is a Fellow of Lothian College, you know. He is *dreadfully* clever—much too clever for a girl like me to talk to. We are afraid of speaking in his presence; and yet he puts us right very gently, and only as if he was sorry for us. His name is Rondelet."

"I know him too," said Lord Alwyne. "I met him once at Oxford when Alan was up. Now see the advantage we old boys have over the young fellows. We don't know any science, we don't care twopence about the new-fangled things in art; we prefer comfort to æsthetics in furniture. We have quite cold hearts towards china——"

"But you must let us like china a little," pleaded the girl.

"And we have no belief in reforming the world. In a word, my dear young lady, we exist only to promote the happiness of our youthful friends of your sex."

"That is very delightful, I am sure!" she replied. "Well, there go Crichton and Cecilia. He chose his own name,

because he said he knew nothing and could do nothing. And Cecilia plays. That is Lesmahago, the tall, thin man with the twisted nose; Una is with him. Then Paris and Hero; and last, the new Brother, Peregrine—isn't he a funny-looking man with his crinkled face? he looks as if he was going to laugh—leading the Abbess, Miranda. Which is the more beautiful, Miranda or Nelly?"

"I should say, Lucy, that for a steady, lasting pattern, warranted to wear, Miranda's beauty is superior to Nelly's. For a surprise, Nelly is incomparable."

"Ah! and then Miranda always looks so queenly. She was born for what she is, the fair chatelaine of a stately palace."

"Lucy, you must come up to London for a season, if only to rid yourself of a most unusual fault in your sex."

"What is that, Lord Alwyne?"

"You speak well of other girls."

"Oh! but why should I not? Miranda is the most beautiful girl I know; she is not like an ordinary girl."

“She was certainly grand in her robes last night, and she looked her part as well as if she had been all her life an Abbess.

“She would not be Abbess at first,” Lucy went on, “but Mr. Dunlop made it a condition of his lending the Court for the use of the Order.”

“Hamlet has lucid intervals,” said Hamlet’s father—not yet the ghost. “Tell me who is the new Brother?”

“It is Mr. Roger Exton.”

“Roger Exton! what Exton?” Lord Alwyne’s knowledge of genealogies was extensive and profound, as becomes an idle gentleman of ancient lineage. “There are Extons of Yorkshire; is he one of them?”

“I do not know. He has not long come back from India, where I believe he made a fortune. And he has brought out a poem called ‘Lalnee and Ramsami, or Love among the Assamese.’ I have not read it, because papa will not send for it; but it is said to be clever.”

“Pity,” said Lord Alwyne, “that poets

and novelists and such people are not kept under lock and key. The illusion is spoiled when you see them. Can't they go about under false names?"

"They are going to dance. See, Miranda goes out with Tom Caledon. She always opens with him, because he is the best dancer in England. I waltzed with him once at the last reception ball. O—oh!"

If there is any more stately dance, any more entirely delightful to watch, than the old-fashioned minuet, I should be glad to hear of it. There is the polonaise: there is a certain rhythmic march, whose name I do not know, which one sees on the stage: there is one single figure in the Lancers—the old Greek *entrelacement* of hands, right and left, girls one way, the men the other: all three have their beauty. And there is the waltz danced by a couple who know how to dance, who know that the Teutonic rapture is to be got, not out of a senseless scramble and a Dervish-like spin-totum movement, but by the skilful swift cadences

of feet and figure, when two pairs of feet and two figures move together, actuated by a single will. But the *minuet de la cour* is an altogether stately and beautiful dance. There are suggestions in it—the awakening of love, the timidity of the lover, the respect due from cavalier to dame, the homage of the strong to the weak, the courtesy of man to woman—which are beautiful to look at when the thing is done as it was done by the Order, smoothly and perfectly. The best among them, despite years and figure, was Sister Desdemonà, who trod the boards as if they were the stage, and took no more account of the spectators than if they had been so many faces in the stalls, or so many opera-glasses in the dress-circle.

When the minuet was finished, they had a grand quadrille ; and then, forming once more in procession, the fraternity marched down the hall, and disappeared.

The music struck up a waltz, and the dancing began again.

Presently the Monks and the Sisters

began one by one to come back, this time in ordinary evening dress. The Abbess did not reappear, nor Brother Hamlet, nor Desdemona ; but most of the others came in quietly, one by one, after they had changed their dress.

There was a rush for the Sisters. Crafty men, who knew all about the customs on reception nights, had been careful to fill up only the first dances on the card, keeping the rest free till the Sisters should appear. There could be no doubt in any one's mind that the fair inmates of the Abbey were, for the most part, fairer and much more desirable than the young ladies who were only guests. Not only were the Sisters all young, but they were all beautiful, and represented nearly every conceivable type of beauty. So that, taken together, they were contrasts ; and taken separately, they were models. And they were all young—the united ages of the nine, taking Sister Desdemona out of the reckoning, would not make two hundred years—and yet they were not so young as to be girlish and

silly. The charm of the very young lies wholly in innocence, ignorance and wonder. That soon palls: take in its place the charm of a woman who, a girl still, has acquired the ideas, the culture, the sense, and the *esprit* which only a year or two of the world can give. It is a charm of which no man ever yet tired. Across the Channel, our unfortunate friends of France can only get it in the young married women. Hence the lamentable tone of their novels, which no doubt represent, not the actual life of Paris, but only what daring novelists believe, or wish to be, the actual life.

Certainly no group of ten ladies more delightful than the Sisters of Thelema could be found in England—and if not in England, certainly nowhere else in the world. They were not united by any bond of common tastes or pursuits, but only by the light chain of gentle breeding and regard for others. Thus, Sister Silvia was a Ritualist, who thought that the oftener you go to church the better it is for your soul, and that Cranmer, Latimer, and Ridley

were let off very, very cheap, with mere roasting. Cecilia, on the other hand, was a Catholic, who held Ritualism in the contempt which is natural to one of the old creed. But she kept her opinion behind the portals of sight and speech, and did not allow it to be apparent. In the same way, both Silvia and Cecilia lived in amity and perfect love with Romola, who was scientific, had a laboratory, and made really dreadful stinks. By the aid of these she proposed to carry on a crusade against ecclesiasticalism among her own sex. Una, on the other hand, was artistic. She painted, modelled, sketched; she had strong ideas on the subjects of form and colour; she had a tall and slender figure which lent itself to almost any costume; and she liked heroines of novels to be *sveltes*, lithe, and lissom. Sister Audrey was a genius. She went to see all the new plays, and she had actually written a play all by herself. It was offered in turn to every manager in London. Their excuses were different, but their unanimity in de-

clining to produce it was as wonderful as it is always upon the stage. For one manager, while regretting his decision very much, said that if it wanted anything, there was a lack of incident ; and another, that the overloading of incident rendered the play too heavy for modern dramatic representation ; a third said that the leading incident was absolutely impossible to be put on any stage ; a fourth, that the leading incident had been done so often as to be quite common and stale ; a fifth, that the dialogue, though natural, was tame ; a sixth, that the cut-and-thrust repartee and epigram with which the dialogue was crammed, gave the whole too laboured an air. And so, with one consent, the managers, lessees, and proprietors refused that play. In revenge, the author, who was an amateur actress, started it in her own company, and represented it whenever she could get a hearing. There was some piquancy at the idea of an amateur play being given by an amateur company, but few of those who saw it once desired to see

it again, and even the company rebelled after a time. So that now Sister Audrey had only the reputation of an amateur success to go upon. She was planning a second play on the great Robertsonian model, which, like many other misguided creatures, she imagined to consist in having no story to tell, and to tell it in a series of short barks, with rudenesses in place of wit. That was *not* Robertson's method, but she thought it was. A bright, clever girl, who, had she been content to cultivate the art of conversation, as she did the art of writing, would have been priceless. Sister Audrey also wrote novels, for the production of which she used to pay a generous publisher £50 down, and, afterwards, the cost of printing, binding and advertising, multiplied by two. So that she did pretty well in literature. In her novels the heroines always did things just ever so little unconventional, and always had a lover who had, in his early and wild days, been a guardsman. He had an immense brown

beard, in which she used to bury her innocent face, while he showered a thousand kisses on her tresses. And he was always punished by marrying the bad girl, who was big and languid, quite heartless, and with a taste for port, so that he lived ever after a remorseful life, haunted by memories of his little Queenie gone broken-hearted.

Another of the Sisters, Cordelia, yearned to see womankind at work; broke her heart over committees and meetings for finding them proper work; lamented because none of them wanted to work; and because, after they had put their hands to the plough, most of them turned back and sat down by the fire, nursing babies. This seemed very sad to Cordelia.

Hero, again—she was a little bright-faced girl, not looking a bit fierce—was a worshipper of “advanced” women. She admired the “courage” of those who get up on platforms and lecture on delicate and dangerous topics; and she refused to listen to the scoffer, when he suggested

that the love of notoriety is with some people stronger than the sense of shame.

The least remarkable of the Sisters, so far as her personal history was concerned, was the Abbess. Miranda had no hobbies. And yet she was more popular than any. This was due to the charm of her manner, which was sympathetic. It is the charm which makes a woman loved as well as admired. Everybody confided in her : she was the confessor of all the Sisters and a good many of the Brothers.

As for these, we shall make their acquaintance later on.

All this time the ball is going on.

Nelly Despard found her card filled up in a few moments, save for two little scratches she makes furtively opposite two waltzes. She was flushed and excited by the strangeness of the whole thing : the reception, the *minuet de la cour*, and the ball itself ; but the minuet above all. The reception was cold, comparatively, because there was no audience. For the minuet she had a large and appreciative assemblage.

Tom Caledon presented himself without any *empressement*, and quite leisurely.

“Did you think, Tom,” she asked, with a little *moue*, “did you think that I was going to keep my card waiting till you condescended to ask me?”

“All gone, Nell? Not one left?”

“Suppose I have kept two waltzes waiting for you.”

“Thank you, Nell; I knew I could depend upon you. You always were a good fellow. Which are they?”

Then she was caught up by her partner, and disappeared from his sight.

Tom went wandering round the room good-naturedly talking to chaperons, and asking wall-flowers to dance with him, and presently came his reward—with Nelly.

Two o'clock in the morning.

In the supper-room, Lord Alwyne, the Vicar, and the Prebendary.

“The Church should countenance all innocent amusements,” said the dignitary. “Will you have another glass of champagne?”

“That is true,” said Lord Alwyne; “but I have looked in vain for a Bishop at a Four-in-Hand Meet. It was very pleasant fooling to-night—glad to see Alan in it. I am going to visit him to-morrow at his cottage. Fancy the owner of Weyland Court living in a labourer’s cottage. Fancy a man five and twenty years of age—sweet five and twenty—with Miranda only half a mile away, and this perfect Paradise of Houris in his own house, and yet—*can* he be my son?”

And at the same time, in another room in the Court, Alan Dunlop, Miranda, and Desdemona. The two ladies are sitting with shawls tied round their heads, at a window, opening to the garden. Alan is standing half in, half out the room. They have forgotten the fooling, and are talking gravely.

“And you are not satisfied, Alan?” asked Miranda.

“No,” he replies, “I am very far indeed from being satisfied: everything is going badly. I believe everything is worse than

when I began ; and I fail more and more to enter into their minds. We do not understand each other, and every day, the possibility of understanding each other seems more remote."

"All this trouble for nothing? It can not be, Alan."

"I fear it is. But it is late, Miranda ; I must go and get three hours' sleep. I have a thatching job to begin at six."

He left them, and walked rapidly away across the park.

Desdemona looked after him and sighed.

"What a pity," she said, taking a different view to the poet, "that he cannot give—to one—to a woman—that noble heart which he squanders on mankind !"

But Miranda would not discuss that question.

"Listen," she said ; "that must be the last waltz. I almost wish I had gone back to the ball. But I wanted to talk to Alan quietly. Good-night, dear Desdemona."



CHAPTER III.

“They swore strange oaths and worshipped at strange shrines ;

They mocked at what the vulgar hold for holy :
They scoffed at teachers, preachers, and divines :
And taught despair, with cultured melancholy.”

“THE only fault in my son, Alan Dunlop,” said his father, “is that he wants youth. He has never been young, and yet he is only five and twenty.”

To want youth is a fault which, with most of us, grows every day more confirmed. It is an incorrigible vice, which only gets worse as the years run on. Here indeed we are all miserable sinners, and the greater the sin, that is, the farther off we are from youth, the greater the sorrow. Which is as it should be.

Alan Dunlop as a boy was a dreamer, with a strong physique. This impelled him into action. The way to make a great reformer, is to get a boy whose brain is like

a sponge for the reception of ideas, and like a hot-house for their growth ; but when his physique is of iron, then you may make a bid at a Luther. No use, however, to produce boys whose ideas are magnificent, and temperaments torpid. He was brought up in the country altogether, at Weyland Court ; and as his mother foolishly thought him delicate, he was educated till eighteen by private tutors, under her own eyes. He was not delicate at all. And one result of his training was, that he learned a great deal more of books than if he had been at Eton ; but had no taste for boys' games ; and read immensely. By his father's orders, he was made, when quite a small boy, to ride every day. Riding and walking were his only methods of taking exercise. His father, however, who spent a large part of his time in London, did not otherwise interfere ; and on finding how very different from himself this son of his was likely to turn out, ceased to manifest much interest in his education. It was clear that a boy who would joyfully spend his whole day in reading philosophy and history, who

delighted to hear conversation on books, and the contents of books, would never have many points in common with himself, who, as he frankly acknowledged, aimed at nothing more elevated than to get out of life whatever pleasures a cultivated creature can. He found that there are a good many pleasures accessible to the man who has health, a good digestion, and a longish purse; and he discovered as the years went on, that with the drawback of east wind in the spring, London offers a larger field of amusement than any other spot on the habitable globe. To be sure, Lord Alwyne Fontaine enjoyed exceptional advantages. He was the younger son of a Duke. That gave him social position, without responsibilities. He received an ample younger son's portion. He married a beautiful woman—beauty was a necessity in his scheme of life—who was also an heiress. Money was also a necessity in his scheme. With his own fortune, his wife's fortune, and the splendid estate and rent-roll which came to her, there was no

obstacle to his gratifying any reasonable wish. On the other hand, he did not go on the turf ; nor did any sharks of the green table dip into his purse ; nor did he bet, save in moderation ; nor did he buy china.

When his son Alan was eighteen, and on the point of entering Lothian College, Oxford, his wife died. Weyland Court with the broad acres round it passed to the son, who took his mother's name. The widower, for his share, had all that was left of his wife's original fortune.

Then Lord Alwyne took chambers in London, and lived there, seeing little of his son, who paid him dutiful visits at the beginning of vacations, if he passed through town, or when he came up to London, not with the frivolous hope of finding amusement and innocent sport in the "little village, as some undergraduates do, but in order to follow out some side-path which led in the direction of culture and light, generally something to do with Art.

He was a shy, reserved man, while an undergraduate. He joined in none of the

ordinary pursuits of the place; was not seen on the river or in the cricket-field; apparently did not know the meaning of billiards, and would have shrunk in horror from such a feast as a freshman's supper-party, with songs after it. He rode a good deal, but chiefly in a solitary way. He furnished his rooms with great sumptuousness, and was always changing the furniture for new or old things, as, from time to time, he changed his notions of advanced taste. He read the customary things, but without enthusiasm, and subsequently obtained a "second." He wrote a good deal of verse, and astonished rather than pleased himself by getting the *Newdigate*.

He was not, however, given over to solitude. On the contrary, he lived a great deal with his own set.

This was the set who, in religion, politics, the science of life, and literature, possessed the advanced ideas. It was the "thoughtful" set. This class read Mill, or pretended to; read Comte, or pretended to; read Ruskin, and talked about putting his

ideas in practice ; read—which is the shortest road nowadays to learning—all the reviews on all the new books, so that they could talk as if they had read the books themselves ; stood before pictures in a row for half an hour together, in silence, as if the thoughts that arose in them were too deep for words ; took up an engraving and laid it down with a sigh ; circulated little poems, not unlike the sonnets of Mr. Rossetti, or the earlier poems of Swinburne, to whom indeed they owed their inspiration, which they showed to each other, and carried about as if they were precious, precious things which only they and their set were worthy to receive. Mostly the verses turned on events of but little interest in themselves, as for instance one, written by Rondelet himself, mystic and weird, showed how the poet stood beneath an archway during a shower, and saw a girl, who came there for the same purpose, having no umbrella. That was all. That was the pathos of it : she had no umbrella. Some, of course, were on

hazardous subjects, the disciples holding the creed, in common with the author of "Jenny," that Art can be worthily bestowed upon any subject whatever. They read, or affected to read, a good deal of certain modern French verse—not Victor Hugo's *bien entendu*.

When Alan Dunlop was in his second year, the Great Movement of the Nineteenth Century began; at least, that is what they called it. I believe it was Alan himself who started it. I mean, of course, the project for advancing humanity by digging ditches and making roads. They sallied forth, these pioneers and humanists, spade in hand; they dug and were not a bit ashamed: in the evening they came home slowly, with backs that ached a great deal, with hands blistered where they were not horny, and with a prodigious appetite, to dine in each other's rooms, talk much about the canons of Art, which they thought they understood, drank vast quantities of claret, spoke judicially on all subjects under the sun, sighed and became melancholy over

the little poems of which I have spoken, and lamented the deplorable ignorance of their elders. A distinguishing mark indeed of the school was the tender pity with which they regarded the outer world; another was their contempt for all other views of life or things. If they met men who held other views—a thing which will happen to even the most exclusive set—they sought to overwhelm them with a single question—only one. They would look up quickly, when there was a pause, and fire their one question, after the manner of Sokrates, as they spelt his name. They did not look for a reply. Now and then they got one, and were even sometimes held up to public derision by some blatant North-countryman, who not only would keep his own vile Philistine opinion, but also dared to defend it.

Their leader was Mr. Paul Rondelet, the author of most of the little manuscript poems. He really was almost too highly cultured, so much so that he could not possibly avoid pitying his fellow-creatures.

He was rather a tall man, with a droop in his head; and he had long white fingers, which played plaintively about his face while he sat. He spoke in a low voice, as if exhausted by the effort of living among humans; and he spoke with melancholy as if his superiority were a burden to him; he affected omniscience; he talked in a vague way, but a good deal, about the *Renaissance*—an epoch which his school keep bottled up all for themselves, as if it were to be enjoyed only by the worthy—he said that we have only one great living poet, Mr. Rossetti; and one who would be great if his meaning were not so plain and simple, Mr. Browning. He said also that the greatest master of modern English is Mr. Pater, and that Mr. Whistler is the greatest artist. He shuddered when Christianity was mentioned; he groaned when any one admired any other modern writer, poet, or painter. As regards politics, he thought a refined despair the only attitude worthy of a great intellect, and he wished to convey the impression that behind his

brow lay infinite possibilities—things—which would make the whole world wonder when they came to be actually done, could he be only—ah! if only—persuaded to pass from meditation to action. He had got a First in the History Tripos, and was a martinet in historical matters; went into agonies if any one used the word Anglo-Saxon; grew angry over the Holy Roman Empire; called Charlemagne, Karl, and Lorraine, Lothringen; spelt his Greek words as in the Greek character, and startled the unwary by talking of Kuros, Thoukudides, Alkibiades, and Korkura; almost ahead of the most advanced line; admitted nothing good except in Germany, yet had a secret passion for Zola, Feydeau, Belot, and other writers. He had no money, being the son of a country vicar, with a living of £500 a year; and his fellowship would expire unless he took Holy Orders in a very few years. If it had not been for the amazing conceit in expression, in attitude, and in voice, Mr. Rondelet would have been certainly good-

looking. Nature meant him even to be handsome; too much culture spoiled that intention.

It was, as a matter of fact, a school of prigs. The truthful historian cannot deny it. Many of them were unhealthy and even morbid prigs. Some of them are still at Oxford; but some may now be found in London. They lounge about sales of china and *bric-à-brac*, they take afternoon tea at the Club, and they worship at the Grosvenor Gallery. They are not loved by any men that I have come across, but are greatly believed in by certain women. They are always promising to do great things, but nothing ever comes. Meantime, they grow daily sadder and yet more sad over the wretched stuff which the outside world, the babbling, eager, fighting world, calls art, poetry, and fiction.

Alas! the outside world cares nothing for its prigs; it goes on being amused; it refuses any hearing to people who neither amuse nor instruct; it is, as it ever has

been, a world of humanity and not a world of prigs. Things there are which one cannot understand about these young men. What will they be like when they grow old? Why do they all talk so much about the *Renaissance*? And will they go on thinking it a proof of superior intellect to affect the atheist of the Italian scholar type? Surely the works of Beccadelli and Fililfo must pall after a time.

Alan Dunlop was, as an undergraduate, no mean disciple of this academy; but he had saving qualities. He was in earnest, while the other men were mostly playing, and he had the courage of his convictions. He was the last to abandon the sacred task of digging ditches and making roads, and only gave it up when it became quite clear to him that he could do no more good, single-spaded, to humanity. Then he began to cast about for some other and some better way. Nothing was to be too rough nothing too difficult; nothing was to require too hard work, if it only was the best thing to do.

He remembered, too, that he was wealthy, and with his friends of the exalted school, began to talk about the responsibility of wealth. It is rare and highly refreshing to find a rich man trying to pass with all his baggage on his back through that narrow archway, intended solely for unladen foot-passengers, known as the "Camel's Eye." Many, therefore, were the discussions held among the small circle of intimate philosophers, as to the duties which this responsibility involved. Prigdom was agitated. As none of them had a farthing except Alan, all were agreed on the doctrine of self-sacrifice. The advancement of humanity was to be the aim: the means, so far as one set of most superior spirits could effect, were to be the fortune of the only rich man among them. There were some, Rondelet among them, who went so far as to hint at a general division of the property, so that instead of one, there might be half-a-dozen apostles. Alan Dunlop could not, however, be brought to see things in this light, and it

was clearly impossible to ask him to divide in so many words.

“There is no work,” said Rondelet, who would not have gone a step out of his way to pick up a fallen man, “that is not honourable in the cause of humanity.”

“True,” murmured a certain weak brother whose faith was small, and who afterwards became that thing which young Oxford mostly contemns, a clerical fellow, and a methodical parish curate. “True; you remember, by the way, how Jerome Paturot, in the sacred cause of humanity, blacked the boots of the fraternity.”

“Of course,” Rondelet replied, “one means real work.”

“Blacking boots *is* real work, as well as digging ditches. Try it for an hour or two.”

“The thing is,” said Dunlop, “to find what is the best work to do, and then to do it, whatever it may be. We have to find out, each for himself, our proper place in the great army, and our work when we get there.”

“One thing at least is certain,” said Rondelet loftily; “it will be ours to command.”

“Say, rather,” Dunlop replied, “to lead.”

With that conviction, that his business was to lead, he left Oxford. It was not a bad conviction for a young man to begin the world with.

His friend, Rondelet, as I have explained, was fortunate in obtaining a fellowship. He remained behind to lecture; sitting sadly, for this was a sort of thing far below a man of intellect and culture, in the College Chapel; listening mournfully to the talk of the senior Dons, poor harmless creatures, contented with the wisdom of their forefathers; commenting to undergraduates on Plato with the melancholy which comes of finding that all modern philosophy and all modern theology are exploded things; an object of interest to some, and of intense dislike to others. As most of the undergraduates revolted from the new paganism of these young lecturers,

and went over to Ritualism with a tendency to become 'verts, Mr. Rondelet grew sadder. Also it grew daily into a more melancholy subject of reflection with him, that unless he took Holy Orders, unless he became that despicable thing upon which he had poured out so many vials of pity and contempt, his fellowship would shortly leave him, and he would actually—he—Rondelet—become penniless. He, with his really cultivated taste for claret, and with a love for little dinners in which dining was exalted to a fine art, and with a taste for all that a young bachelor mostly desires ! .

For it is an extraordinary thing to observe how the superior class, while they can never sufficiently deride and pity the British workman who gets drunk—Tom and 'Arry who go down to Margate brandishing bottles of stout, and the honest British tradesman who when his income expands lets two puddings smoke upon the board are of all men the least inclined to forego the pleasures of the senses. No

anchorites, the prigs of the nineteenth century ; and if they do not drink so much as their ancestors, it is that they have discovered the very much greater pleasure to be got by keeping the palate clean, in which we had better all imitate them.

At two-and-twenty, Alan Dunlop returned to Weyland Court, eager to start upon his career as a regenerator of the world.

How to begin ?

Miranda, who was now eighteen, and as beautiful as the day, was as eager as himself to witness the rapid strides in the direction of culture about to be made by the peasantry of the place. They held constant council together. The experiment was to be tried by Alan Dunlop on his own people first, and, if successful, was to be repeated on hers. That was right, because, as a girl, she would not enter personally on the struggle with such vigour or such authority as her friend. She would watch, while he worked ; she would make notes and compare, and set forth results. / Mean-

time, they had no doubt but that in a short time the manners of the people would be raised almost to their own level.

“Of course they will give up drink, Alan,” said Miranda.

“That must be the first thing. I will begin by becoming a teetotaler.” Alan said this with a sigh, for like the majority of mankind, the juice of the grape was pleasant unto him. “We must lead, Miranda.”

“Yes.” She too sighed, thinking of champagne at suppers and luncheons.

“And smoking too,” added Miranda.

“Yes, I shall burn all my cigar-cases, and turn the smoking-room at the Court into an additional study.” This, too, was a sacrifice, because the “school” at Oxford were fond of choice brands.

“And they must be encouraged to choose subjects of study.”

“Yes,” said Alan, “of that we must talk very seriously. What should they study first?”

It was decided that they could not do

better then begin with the science of Hygiene.

The two conspirators took a leisurely stroll down the village street, which was half a mile long, with cottages on either side.

There was clearly a good deal of work before this village could become a city of Hygeia, and the hearts of both glowed at the prospect of tough work before them, just as the heart of Hercules must have glowed when he smelt and beheld the Augean stable; or that of Mr. Gladstone must bound with gladness when he stands before some more than usually tough monarch of the forest, while crowds are there to witness his dexterity.

Miranda Dalmeny, not yet Abbess of Thelema, was in one respect like Alan. She was an heiress, and owner of an estate which marched with that of Alan Dunlop. Her father was dead, and by his death she became at once one of the richest girls in a rich county. Her house, far inferior in stately grandeur to Weyland Court, stood on the edge of Wey-

land Park. It was called Dalmeny Hall. Here she lived with her mother, who was an invalid ; a fact which kept her almost entirely in the country. And here, from infancy, she had known Alan Dunlop. As children they walked, ran and rode together ; as boy and girl they played, quarrelled, made it up, and told each other all their thoughts. Then came a time when Miranda, *more feminino*, retired within herself, and felt no longer the desire to pour confidences into Alan's ear. He, however, went on still. So that she followed him through his boyish readings ; through the speculations with which he amused his tutor in the critical age of sixteen to eighteen ; and through the realms of impossible culture, which his imagination, while an undergraduate, revealed to the astonished girl.

They were, in a way, like brother and sister. And yet—and yet—brothers and sisters may kiss each other with kisses which Hood calls “insipid things, like sandwiches of veal.” And indeed they do lack a something. Brother and sister may know each

other's tendencies and motives without being told ; they may tease each other ; they may depend upon each other, ask services of each other, and exact as well as give. Alan Dunlop and Miranda did not kiss each other ; they did not exact any service, nor did they tease each other, nor did they pretend to any knowledge of motive, tendency, or aim in each other. So far they were not brother and sister. Yet they always comforted each other with the thought that such was their relationship. They wrote long letters one to the other, and they had long talks, rides, and evenings together. Weyland Court was a dull great place for a young man to be in all alone ; and he spent most of his time, while in the country, at Dalmeny Hall.

Alan began his grand experiment in the advance of humanity with a lecture in the school-room.

The labourers all came, all listened with the same stolid stare or closed eyes with which they received the Vicar's sermon. The Vicar was there, too ; he sat in the

chair and contemplated the audience with a benevolent but incredulous smile.

When the lecture was over, he began to throw cold water, as experienced Vicars will, on the young Squire's projects.

"It was delightful, Alan, and so true," cried Miranda.

"Yes, yes!" said the Vicar. "Did you notice their faces, Weyland?"

"Not much, I was thinking of my subject."

"I did; they wore exactly the same expression as they have in church, during the sermon. My dear boy, I have watched them for five and twenty years; I have tried them with every kind of sermon, and nothing makes any difference with them."

Miranda looked as if the appearance of a young prophet would make all the difference. The Vicar understood her look, and smiled.

The lecture had been on the "Beauty of Cleanliness." It will hardly be believed that next day not one single attempt was

made to improve the village, and yet the language of the discourse was worthy of Ruskin, an imitation, indeed, of that great writer's style.

This was disheartening.

The young Squire tried another lecture, and yet another, and a fourth ; yet no outward improvement was visible.

"You have sown the seed, Alan," said Miranda, consoling him.

O woman—woman! when disappointment racks the brow——!

But this was seed which, like mustard and cress, ought to come up at once if it meant to come up at all. It did not come up.

"What shall I do?" Alan asked the Vicar.

"You are young ; you are anxious to do the best, and you do not see your way. That is all natural. Tell me, Alan, do you think that a three years' residence at Oxford has been quite enough by itself to teach you the great art of managing and leading men ? Believe me, there is no task

that a man can propose to himself more mighty, more worthy or more difficult.”

Alan assented to the objection.

“You think I have begun too soon, then? Perhaps a year’s more reading—”

“Hang the reading, man! You have begun without comprehending mankind, Alan. Put away your books, and look around you. Whenever you are trying to find out how other people look at things, remember that there are a hundred ways of looking at everything, and that every one of these ways may be burlesqued and misrepresented, so as to become contemptible to ninety-nine men; but not to the hundredth man. That is the important thing. You’ve got to consider that hundredth man; you’ll find him always turning up, and he is, I do assure you, the very deuce and all to manage.”

Alan laughed.

“And if I were you, my boy, I would travel. See the world. Go by yourself, and forget your theories.”

Alan consulted Miranda. She urged him,

because, with womanly insight, she saw that he was yet unripe for the task he had set himself, to take a year of quiet wandering.

“Travel,” the Vicar wrote to Lord Alwyne, “will knock the new-fangled nonsense out of his head.”

It would, in fact, do nothing of the kind; it would only modify the new-fangled nonsense, and give the traveller new ideas with which to mould his schemes.

Alan packed up his portmanteau, shook hands with Miranda, and went away by himself.



CHAPTER IV.

“Home-keeping youths have ever homely wits.”

“ONCE away from England and the new crotchets,” repeated the Vicar, “Alan will come round again.”

“Do you think men *can* grow out of prigdom?” asked Lord Alwyne plaintively.

“Define me a prig,” returned the Vicar.

“Definition requires thought. It is hardly worth the exertion.”

Lord Alwyne sat up, and nerved himself for an effort.

“Yet you recognise a prig when he speaks, just as you know a cad when you see him, and before he speaks. Not only does the prig approach every subject from the point of view peculiar to prigdom : but all prigs speak in the same tone. Do you

remember the Oxford prig when we were undergraduates? He had advanced views, if I remember right, about episcopal authority. He was offensively and ostentatiously earnest too. But he was mild—our prig was mild—compared to the modern creatures among whom my unhappy son has thrown away his youth. Let us define a prig as a man who overdoes everything. He becomes a prig because he is not equal to his assumed position. He is not, for instance, equal to the duties of a critic, and falls back upon unquestioned maxims, which rule his opinions. And the universal maxim among prigs is that no one has a right to be heard outside their own body. I wonder," he went on with a sigh, "I really wonder what unfortunate Oxford has done to be so plagued with prigs. You go to Cambridge, and you find them not—at least, I am told they are rare. At Oxford there are two or three gathered together in every Common Room."

"It is the effect of too much cultivation on a weak brain," said the Vicar, "and

wears off as men get older. Affectations never last in theology, literature, or art. These young men have nothing new to say, and yet desire greatly to seem to have something new. So they invent a sort of jargon, and call it the only language for the expression of the 'higher thought!'

"Yes," said Lord Alwyne, "everything with them is in the comparative degree. There is the higher thought, the nobler aim, the truer method—meaning, I suppose, their own thought, and aim, and method. Well—well—and so you really think, Vicar, that my son will come back improved; will drop the livery of prigdom, and talk and think like other people."

"I am sure he will," said the Vicar confidently.

Alan was away for two years. During this space of time he went all round the world making observations, his object being chiefly to discover how best to lead his fellow-men.

First he went to Quebec. On the steamer he made the acquaintance of the

third officer, a man of great experience, who had once been admiral in command of the fleet of the Imam of Muscat. He resigned his appointment because the Imam refused to rank him higher than the twenty wives' allowance, whereas he stuck out for such superior rank as is granted by right to forty wives.

"Not," said the honest fellow, "that I wanted twenty wives, bless you, nor forty neither, being of opinion that a sailor gets on best when he's got nobody to draw his pay but himself. But the honour of my country was at stake. So I struck my pennant, and came away, and here I am, aboard the *Corsican*, third officer in the Dominion Line. That's a drop from an admiral, ain't it?"

Alan did not remember to have heard any of the customs peculiar to Muscat, and was surprised to learn that the people were most open to influence, and most easily persuaded. He asked how that influence was maintained.

"Give your orders," said the ex-admiral.

“ If they don't carry out them orders, cut their livers out.”

This method, however effective, was clearly impracticable as regarded Alan's own tenants. And yet it seemed to himself by no means unsuitable to the people of Muscat. Why was this? Why should a thing good for Muscat be bad for England? He reflected, however, that he had not yet so far schooled himself in the enthusiasm of humanity as to recognise an equal in every thick-skulled negro or wily Asiatic. So that it could not, really, be good for Muscat to cut out livers.

When he got to Quebec he began to make inquiries about the French Canadians. They bore the best character in the world. They were pious, he was told; they were sober; they were industrious; they were honest; they were fond parents of a prolific offspring. He went among them. After, with great difficulty, getting to understand their language—their talk is that of a country district in Normandy, in the seventeenth century—he found out that

they were all these things—and more. The more was not so attractive to the stranger. Their contentment he found was due to profound ignorance, and their want of enterprise to their contentment.

“You may lead the people,” a priest told him, “with the greatest ease, so long as you do not ask them to receive a single new idea.”

Now what Alan wanted was, to inspire his people with the newest of ideas, and with an ardent desire for new ideas. What seemed good for French Canadians was not good for Englishmen. So he went westward—stopped a few nights at Montreal, which is the place where the English Canuk, the French Canadian, the Yankee, the Englishman, the Scotchman, the Irishman, the German, and the Jew meet, and try their sharpness on each other. It is a very promising city, and will some day become illustrious. But there was little reason for a social philosopher to stay there. He went still westward, and reached Toronto. This was like being at Edin-

burgh. There, however, he heard of those backwood settlements where the forests have been cleared, and the land planted, by men who went there axe in hand, and nothing else. It is only a single day's journey to get from the flat shores of Toronto, and the grey waves of Lake Ontario, to the hills and rocks, the lakes, firs, and hemlocks of the backwoods. And there Alan found himself among a people who were not led, but who moved on by themselves, under the guidance of their own sense and resolution. This phenomenon surprised him greatly, and he made copious notes. None, however, of the stalwart farmers could give him any philosophical reasons for the advance of the colony.

"We send the little ones to school," one of them told him. "We have our singing choirs, and our lectures, and our farms to attend to, and we mean to push on somehow."

That is the difference, Alan observed, between the common Englishman and the Canadian. The latter means to push on

somehow. How to instil that idea into his own people? He made more notes and returned to Toronto. Then he went to Niagara, and stayed there for a month, meditating over against the mighty Falls, till the echoes of the thundering river, rolling louder and louder, and the thought of the mass of ever-falling waters growing daily greater and greater, grew too loud and too vast for his brain; and then he came away. He was perplexed by the contrast of the French Canadians, led by their priests, who never want to move, and the English led by the one thought, that they "mean to push on somehow," which is to them like the cloud of smoke by day and the pillar of fire by night. And he thought all the time of his own rustics who came like sheep to his lectures, sat like sheep while he delivered them, and went away understanding no more than sheep.

However, in the States he would certainly learn something. Everybody who is going to try a new social experiment should begin by going to America, if only

to strengthen his faith. This, in new social experiments, is apt to be shaken by the fear of ridicule. Anything like a novel adjustment of the relations between capital and labour, landlord and tenant, farmer and labourer, buyer and seller, husband and wife, governor and governed, requires in England such extraordinary courage and confidence that it is absolutely indispensable first to visit a country where new institutions are attempted without such hesitation and fear. New things are tried in America which would be impossible in England, and yet they do not succeed, because, I suppose, the most red-hot reformer becomes Conservative when you touch the unwritten laws by which all his ideas are governed unconsciously to himself.

Alan Dunlop was going, somehow, to reconstruct the whole of the social fabric. He was about to show on the small scale of his own estates how culture—what his friends called “The Higher Culture,” sighing when they thought how rare it is—may coexist with the necessities of the roughest

daily toil, and differing in rank or station be recognised by those who are yet all equal in their love of "The Higher Art." It had been his favourite thesis, disputed by the rest, while still among the prigs, that this was not only possible, but within the compass and power of any one man.

"Why," he would ask, with as much warmth as the fashion of his school allows, "why should a man, because he goes out hedging and ditching, because he carts muck, feeds pigs, even"—he shuddered—"even kills them, be unable to rise to the levels on which We stand? Can we not imagine him, when his work is done, sitting with thankful heart in the contemplation of some precious work, over which thought may plunge ever deeper, and never come to the end of all it teaches?"

It was generally conceded that the imagination might go so far as to conceive this vision. Then Alan would continue to argue that whatever the mind of man can conceive, the hand of man can execute; in other words, that the ploughman might be

gently and yet rapidly led upward, till his thoughts rested habitually on the highest levels. And this was his mission in life.

He visited, and examined with the greatest interest, all the new social and religious communities which he could hear of. There were those modern Essenes who have everything in common, and who neither marry nor are given in marriage; those thinkers who hold that divorce should be granted on the formal request of either party to the contract of that partnership, which we English hold to be indissoluble even by common consent of both husband and wife, except for reasons held by law sufficient; the community who divide the work among each other, and serve it out irrespective of liking or fitness, so that he who would fain be writing at home has to go out and weed the cabbages or sell the strawberries; the people who work or are idle just as they please; the institution—in this he was particularly interested—in which the rude farm-work of the morning is followed by transcendental discussion in the

evening. Alan was disappointed here, because he only had one evening to spare for the place, and they asked so much about England that it was bed-time before the philosophy began. Then he visited a community in which emancipated woman ruled subject man, and let him have a rough time, until he either revolted or ran away. And he went to see the place where the Elect live together, and dance for the love of the Lord. Then he became acquainted with the doctrines and tenets of vegetarians, egg-and-fruit-arians, wheat-and-corn-arians, and total abstainers. He found a little knot of people who would have neither ruler, magistrate, elder, priest, nor clergyman among them at all, but ruled their affairs for themselves by a parliament which sits every evening for seven days in the week, and where the talk never ceases. This is the reason why, outside their Parliament House, they are a silent folk. He also visited the Mormons, the Mennonites, and Oneida Creek. And everywhere he made notes.

In all his researches on the American continent, he was struck with the fact that the people had no leaders; they seemed to lead themselves. That unhappy country has no heaven-sent and hereditary officers. They have to live without these aids to civilisation; and it must be owned they seem to get on very well by themselves. But the British labourer requires—he absolutely requires—thought Alan, to be led. And how to lead him? How to acquire influence over him? How to become his prophet? How to instil into his mind a purpose? This dreadful difficulty oppressed our inquiring traveller, followed him from one country to another, and became at times a sort of Old Man of the Island upon his shoulders.

“Send him over here, sir,” said an American with whom he discussed, without exposing his own views, the character of the British ploughman; “send him over here, sir! He can’t sit down and be contented in this climate. Discontent is in the air; ambition is in the air; and there

are no parish workhouses. What you've done with your labourer is this : you've planted him in a juicy and fertile country, where the rain and fogs make him crave for drink. He's got a farmer driving him at starvation wages on the one side, and the clergyman's wife and the squire's wife and daughters cockering him up on the other. What with too low wages and too much alms-taking, you've knocked all the man out of him. Here he gets no cockering ; there's no squire, no vicar, no union, and no distribution of blankets and flannel. You go home, sir, and try your folk on our tack for fifty years or so."

That was absurd when Alan wanted to show his results in five years, or thereabouts.

"Of course," his American friend went on, "of course it is absurd to tell you, sir, because you know it already, the main difference between our men and yours."

"You mean——"

"I mean the land. When you get your yeomen back again, if ever you do,

you will find that out. Do you own land, sir?"

"I do."

"Then let your men buy it up on easy terms; and then you leave them alone to work out their own salvation."

This was a hard saying for a young man who had great possessions—give up his land, and then leave the people alone? What then was the good of having been a leader in undergraduate advanced circles, and an acknowledged exponent of the Higher Thought?"

After his experiences in the Eastern States, he crossed the Continent, and visited California; there he went to see mining cities, the Yosemite Valley, the City of Sacramento, and the Chinese quarter of San Francisco. There were also the lions. From San Francisco he went to Japan, which he found Anglicised; and from Japan he went to Hong Kong. This enabled him to visit the sleepy old city of Macao, where the manners and customs are half of Portugal, half of China, and

Canton. The student in social economy cannot get much assistance from the Chinese. A nation who, when they have got a man too lazy, too vicious, too worthless for anything else, make him a priest, may be used by advanced thinkers to point an epigram or illustrate a sneer, but cannot inspire such enthusiasm as leads to admiration.

Alan completed his journey round the world in the usual way—he went to Calcutta, Delhi, Simla, Cashmere, and Bombay. He landed at Suez, and after the usual voyage up the Nile and down again, he rode through the Holy Land, and thence across Asia Minor to Erzeroum, finishing the whole by travelling from Odessa to Moscow and St. Petersburg, and so home. I hope that he finds the observations he then made on Russian civilisation of use to him at the present juncture.

It is not given to every young man of three or four and twenty to make this extended survey of humanity in general. The general effect produced on the mind of this traveller was revolutionary. Partly

as the Vicar anticipated, the old things felt away from him. He ceased to think in the narrow grooves of exclusive priggdom; he found that men and women may hold different views from himself, and yet be pleasant, and not Philistine; he saw that a good deal of the Art he had been taught to reverence was but a poor thing, conveying in stiff pretence at ease, weak or well-used thoughts with feebleness of expression; he understood what a wretched quality is that intellectual conceit which he had been accustomed to think a mark of distinction; and he really did quite succeed in comprehending that Oxford is *not* the centre of the universe; and he left off being sad. Now these were great gains. He wrote to Miranda on his arrival in London:

“I hope to see you the day after tomorrow. I have an immense deal to say, both of the past and the future. I think I have discovered my error in the past, and its remedy for the future. We tried to improve our people by injunction and precept, pointing out methods and rules.

That I am convinced is not the best way. They will neither be led nor ordered. But suppose, Miranda, that one were to walk beside them, work with them, eat with them, play with them, be one of them, and thoroughly enter into their very thoughts—how would that do?”

“How would that do?” echoed Miranda in dismay, as she read the letter. “And what in the world does Alan mean? Is he going to put on a smock-frock?”



CHAPTER V.

“ Rich with the spoils of travel, home he came.”

ALAN came home. As a dutiful son he called upon his father, in his chambers. Both were agreeably surprised. The father did not seem to the son so frivolous as he had been, nor did the son appear to the father so weighed down with the responsibilities of his position.

“ I congratulate you, Alan,” said Lord Alwyne—it was at noon ; the man of the world celebrated his son’s return after the fashion of the world, with a little mid-day luncheon, which he called a breakfast—“ I congratulate you, my son. You have seen the world, and shaken off your Oxford crotchets.”

“ Say, exchanged some of them for new ones, and modified others,” said Alan. “ We

were ignorant at Oxford ; but we used to search for ideas. If I am changed, however, you are not."

"I am two years older, which is two years worse. In other respects, I believe I am much the same as when you last saw me. Life has nothing new to offer after fifty ; and it is a good thing to enjoy the same old pleasures. I still find good wine desirable ; I prefer young women to old ; I like cheerful people better than those who weep ; and though the cask is getting low, I am glad to say that it still runs clear."

His son looked round the room. His father was quite right, and there was no change. The same statuettes, pictures, and books, the same comfortable chairs, the same air of studied and artistic pleasantness about everything, as if the very furniture had to be consulted about its companions. And on the little table in the window, the same pile of letters and invitations ; most of them in feminine handwriting. No change ; and yet he did not find this kind of life so entirely frivolous as

in the old days, when to think of his father's manner of living was to raise up the fifth commandment before his eyes like a ghost, with warning gesture. Surely Alan Dunlop had made a great step out of prigdom when he arrived at the stage of toleration for a life which was not tormented by a sense of responsibility. He even envied his father. Not that he would exist in the same way; but he envied the happy temper which enables a man to live in the passing moment, and to let each single day begin and end a round of endeavours after happiness.

“If one may ask, Alan”—his father was lying in one of those *chaises longues* which give support to the feet, his cigarette-case was on a little table beside him, with a cup of coffee, and his face, after the excellent breakfast, was more than usually benevolent—“If one may ask, Alan, about your plans for the future? Let me see, when you went away it was after proposing to reform the world by means of evening lectures, I believe.”

“Yes,” Alan replied, a little shortly; “I was younger then. The people came, but they thought they were in church, and treated my lecture like a sermon; that is, they went to sleep.”

“Just what one would have expected. By the way, your remark is a dangerous one in these Radical times. People might ask, you know, what kind of teachers those have been to whom we have committed the care of the poor, if it is proverbial that sleep and preaching go together.”

Alan laughed. This was one of the few points in which he could agree with his father. Nothing pleases the advanced thinker—say, a thinker of the higher order—than a sneer at the clergy. It is pleasant, I suppose, to feel one’s self so much superior to the constituted spiritual teachers of the people.

“Lectures are of no use,” Alan went on, “by themselves. We must not only direct and teach, but we must lead. My next attempt will be to lead.”

“Ye—yes,” said his father; “that sounds well as a general principle. To descend to particulars, now.”

“My project is hardly ripe just yet,” Alan replied; “when it is in working order, I will ask you to come down and see it for yourself. Will that do?”

“Perfectly, perfectly, Alan. Nothing is more wearisome than a discussion of probabilities. If I find your plan a failure, I can enjoy the luxury, since I know nothing about it beforehand, of swearing that I always knew it to be impracticable. Do not deprive me of that luxury.”

Alan laughed.

“I am going down to the Court this afternoon,” he said, “I shall talk over my schemes with Miranda, and take her advice.”

“Miranda!” his father’s face lit up, as it always did, at the thought of a pretty woman. “Miranda! She was pretty when you went away; she is lovely now, and full of fancies. I love a woman to have whims, always looking out, you know, for the new

gospel. It is delightful to find such a girl. She was up in London last season ; turned the heads of half the young fellows, and all the old ones ; refused a dozen offers, including Professor Spectrum, who thought she came to his lectures out of love for him, whereas she came, you see, because she thought physics and chemistry a part of the modern culture. Then she went back to her place in the country ; and I believe she is there still. I will go down, as soon as these confounded east winds disappear, and make love to her myself. I will, Alan, upon my word I will."

Alan looked as if he hardly approved of this frivolous way of discussing Miranda, and presently went away, whereupon Lord Alwyne sat down and wrote a letter.

" MY DEAR MIRANDA,

" It is two o'clock in the afternoon. I have written all my letters, had breakfast with Alan, smoked three cigarettes, and read all the papers ; what remains, but to write a letter, all about nothing, to the loveliest girl

I know? N.B.—This is not old-fashioned politeness—Regency manners—but the natural right of a man who has kissed you every year, at least once, since you were a baby in arms. You will have seen Alan before you get this letter. Tell me what you think of him. For my own part, I find him greatly improved. He has lost that melancholy which naturally springs from having had such very superior persons for his friends. He is livelier; he has more feeling for the frivolities of an old man like myself. He is, in a word, much less of a prig than he was. Imagine the joy of a father who hates prigs. I am not without hopes that he may yet come to the point of being able to laugh at a good story.

“Of course, he has a head full of projects, and he will carry them straight to you. I was afraid, at one point of the breakfast, that he was going to confide them to me; but he refrained, for which I am grateful. I forgot to tell you that he accepted the comfort of my chambers and the little light follies of my conversation without that

mute reproachful gaze, which used to make me wonder whether he really was my son, or whether he had been changed at nurse, and belonged, perhaps, to the converted carpenter. As, however, his ideas, filtered through your brain, will assume a far more attractive form, I confess I should like you to write me word what they amount to; and, as I may be allowed to take some interest in his proceedings, I shall ask you to throw all the weight of your good sense in the scale. If he should propose to part with the property for any philanthropic schemes, I think I would go the length of locking him up in a private lunatic asylum, where they will tickle the soles of his feet with a feather.

“Writing to you about Alan makes me think of a conversation we had, you and I, that afternoon last year, when you gave up a whole day to delight an elderly lover of yours with your society. You remember the talk, perhaps. We were floating down the river under the Clieveden woods, you and I, in a boat together. I told you

what were my greatest hopes. You blushed very prettily, but you said nothing at first, and that elderly lover promised you, at your own request, never to speak of such a thing again ; and never, even in the most distant manner, to suggest such a possibility to Alan.

“ For once—I believe the very first time in all my life—I am going to break a promise made to a lady, and speak to you about ‘ such a thing ’ again. Those hopes have revived again, and are stronger than ever. ‘ Such a thing ’ would make me happy about Alan’s future. As for his present, it is not right that a boy of his age, sweet five and twenty, should be chasing a philanthropic will-o’-the-wisp, when all round him, in this delightful world, there are flowers to gather, feasts to hold, and the prettiest women that ever were to fall in love with. Life ought to be to him, as it has been to me, one Eden of delight, and he makes it a workshop. Why, he even mentioned your name—yours, without any apparent emotion, without hesitation, blushing, or sinking of

the voice. Think of it, when even I, after all my experience, handle the name of Miranda with a kind of awe, as befits that of a goddess.

“And yet he is my son, really. I must inquire about that converted carpenter. Sometimes I feel constrained—pity the sorrows of a poor old man!—to go straight on my less rheumatic knee, the right one, and offer you the devotion of the short remainder of an elderly life, as the man in the play says, as a substitute for youth, the absence of which no devotion could atone for, and the few fragments of a heart long since torn in pieces by a succession of beautiful and gracious girls, if those fragments are worth picking up; but, indeed, they are not.

“I wish I could be sitting with you in your own room, overlooking Weyland Park. I should come disguised as Cupid; I should bring bow and arrow, and when Alan came along with his long face as full of care as if he were a married pauper, I should let him have a shaft full in the place

where his heart ought to be; but I don't think he has one.

“Good-bye, my dear Miranda. You know that I am always as actively devoted to your service as age and rheumatism will allow. Write me a long letter, and tell me everything.

“A. F.”



CHAPTER VI.

MIRANDA wrote in reply almost by return of post.

“DEAR LORD ALWYNE,

“ A thousand thanks for your letter. I wish I had a great many more lovers like yourself, as devoted and as unselfish. It is very delightful to have some one to say kind things and make one vain. I wonder if it is as pleasant for you to say them as it is for girls to hear them said. Come down and stay with us if you can make up your mind to a dull house, and only me for a companion. You shall sit in my room all day long if you like, and look out over Weyland Park, which is very beautiful just now ; I think the place grows more beauti-

ful every year. But I will not consent to disguises either as Cupid or anything else, and I will accept your devotion without any kneeling.

“It really was a delightful day that we had together on the river last year, and we must try for another. Only no pleasure seems able to be repeated exactly in the same way. If we were to go there again it would probably rain, or I might be in a bad temper.

“Alan came to see us as soon as he arrived. I saw him marching across the park, and I will confess to you that I took my opera-glasses in order to have a good look at him, while he was yet afar off. His shoulders have broadened out, and he walks more upright. He has lost that stoop which used to make him look as if he was always working out a difficult problem. I think his beard improves him, somehow; though you do not wear a beard, it makes him look more like you. His eyes, as he walked over the turf, had a far-off look, just as they used to before he went to Oxford,

and was always dreaming about the future. So I saw he was back again in the world of imagination, and not thinking of me at all. To you, because Alan and I are and always will be brother and sister, I may confess that I think this brown-bearded man with blue eyes the handsomest man I have ever seen, as he is the most gentle and the most disinterested.

“When I thought he might be near enough to see me with my glasses, I put them down and went out to meet him. He was as glad to greet me as I was to greet him, I think.

“It was six o'clock. Mamma was well enough to dine with us—it was one of her better days, fortunately. We had a talk in the garden before dinner, and after dinner a long talk, he and I alone.

“Your son is greatly changed, Lord Alwyne; in some respects completely changed. He looks at everything from a new point of view, and I can see that he has been thinking and studying during the whole of his two years' travel.

“All the old schemes are to be abandoned, and an entirely new plan adopted. I confess that at first I was amazed at his scheme, but I am beginning to believe that it is not only noble, but also feasible. It is, to put it in as few words as possible, this : There is to be no more lecturing and teaching. That, he says, is proved by experience to be useless. Any one can point the way like a sign-post ; any one can stand on a hill and cry out to the people below to climb up if they can as he has done ; any one can write books full of precious thoughts, if he have them himself ; but you cannot always persuade people to read them. The lower classes, he says, all over the world are exactly alike, except in the United States. They will neither read, listen, nor see, with understanding. They are slaves, not to laws, which touch them very little, but to habit and custom. The only way, therefore, to improve the masses, is to break down the slavery of habit.”

When Lord Alwyne—he was reading

this letter at breakfast—got as far as this, he put it down, and heaved a sigh.

“I asked her to bring him to common sense, and he has inoculated her. Habit and custom? And a very good thing for the people too. Let their customs be cleanly, their habits pleasant for other people, and their manners civil. What more does the boy want? Rigmarole.”

“I am sure you will agree with Alan so far. In fact, all this is preliminary.”

“Yes,” said Lord Alwyne. “I knew that something more was coming.”

“How then, asks Alan, is the task of substituting culture and inquiry for sluggish habit to be undertaken? There is, he says, but one way. By example. He will come down from his high place, descend to their levels, work with them, eat with them, live with them, and endeavour to set the example of the higher life, and to show how that is possible even with the surroundings of a cottage, and the pay of a farm labourer.

“Not what we give, but what we share :
For the gift without the giver is bare.’”

“The Devil!” This was the reader’s interruption. “Now those two will go on fooling the rustics, till they make the whole country-side intolerable.”

“I cannot say,” continued Miranda in the letter, “how much I admire a man who gives himself. That is so much higher a thing—so much nobler—than to give money.”

“If they had my money,” said Lord Alwyne, “they might have me with it too, for all I should care. Certainly I should not be of much use without it. Go on, my dear Miranda. It is pleasant talking over a breakfast-table.”

“It is like going out to fight for your country.”

“Worse,” murmured the reader. “Much worse. I’ve done that, and I ought to know. Except for the trenches, it wasn’t bad fun. And at least one didn’t live with rustics.”

“ Or it is giving up all that one has been accustomed to consider bare necessities : abandoning for a time the gentle life.”

“ I am glad it is only for a time. And I hope,” said Lord Alwyne, “ that it will be for a very short time.”

“ And it is certainly exposing one’s self to the misrepresentation and ridicule of people who do not understand you ; to unpopularity in the county——”

“ Unpopularity indeed !” cried Lord Alwyne. “ Now I hope to Heaven the boy will not meddle with the Game. Anything but that. And in such a county too !”

“ And possible failure !”

“ Ah ! ha !” The reader laughed. “ Possible failure ! Ho ! ho !”

“ All these Alan will cheerfully face. He must have our support and sympathy, and we must wish him success.

“ If you would like to hear more details of the plan——”

“ I should not,” said Lord Alwyne.

“ Come down and stay with us. You might have Weyland Court all to yourself, and even sleep in the haunted room, if you prefer ; but as Alan is entirely occupied with his plans, I think you would see little of him, and would be more comfortable with us.”

“ I most certainly should, my dear Miranda,” said Lord Alwyne.

But he had to postpone his visit, because some one, who had a charming wife, who also had two charming sisters, proposed to him that he should join them, and all go to Egypt together, to escape the English winter. When he returned, it was at the beginning of the London season, and he had so many people to see that he could not possibly get away till July. Finally, it was not till Nelly Despard took the vows that he was able to get down to Weyland Court. And by that time Alan’s experiment was a year old.



CHAPTER VII.

“Yet have my thoughts for thee been vigilant,
Bound to thy service with unceasing care.”

As Miranda told Lord Alwyne, no time was lost in putting the new plans into execution.

“By actually living among the people,” said Alan, with the calmness of conviction, “I shall in a short time succeed in persuading them to look upon me as one of themselves—a simple fellow-labourer, who has received a better education, and had greater advantages to start with. I suppose one cannot hope wholly to eradicate the feeling of caste. And for the present, that seems not quite desirable. It is well, until all have alike the same education, that the better educated, who are also the richer

and the more cultivated, should be looked upon as the natural leaders."

"Surely, Alan," said Miranda, "you are by birth as well as education the natural leader of these people?"

"I think I am," he replied, with that far-off look in his blue eyes which belongs to the enthusiast. "I am certain I am; otherwise there would remain nothing but to sit down in indolent ease at Weyland Court, and live the ignoble life of the country squire."

That is what he called it: the enviable life where there are no duties, no daily mill, and no care for the yearly income, the life of the country gentleman—he called it "that ignoble life."

"It is a beautiful dream," said Miranda. "And, oh! Alan, I wish I could rise with you to the belief that the dream will ever become a reality. I want your enthusiasm as well as your self-devotion."

"It must—it will become a reality, Miranda," he answered, with a flush of conviction. "I have chanced upon the one

thing wanting in all the old schemes. *They* directed, *we* lead ; *they* instructed, *we* set the example. Our sports, our labours, our joys will be what theirs should be ; as their life ought to be, so will we try to make ours. In externals, at least, we shall be on the same footing ; as our habits will be, so ought theirs to be."

Miranda listened with kindling eyes. Her heart beat with sympathetic fire in the presence of this strong and brave nature which dared to follow out a line of its own—the line of right. And she sought in vain for examples in history of others who had thus practically and earnestly devoted themselves to the safety or regeneration of mankind. Quintus Curtius, a leading case, narrowed his self-sacrifice to patriotism ; monks and nuns still further narrow theirs to the advantage of their own individual souls ; curates and parsons, who work day and night among the slums, gladly exchange these retreats for the more congenial sphere of country livings ; professional philanthropists not unfrequently exaggerate

the pecuniary value of their services, and have even been known to help themselves secretly from the treasury ; but that a man like Alan Dunlop, with everything at his hand which men crave for, should voluntarily resign them all, and become a labourer amongst labourers, without hope or prospect of reward, was a thing wholly without parallel.

They were talking in Miranda's own room at Dalmeny Hall, the place which the young heiress had daintily adorned to suit her own tastes. It was a room on the first floor, which overlooked Weyland Park. It had a south aspect, it was fitted and furnished with everything that is delicate, pretty, artistic, and delightful, from the pictures on the wall to the carpets and the chairs. The time was just before the establishment of the Abbey, when Alan spent most of his leisure-time discussing things at Dalmeny Hall with the fair chatelaine, who alone of mortals regarded his project with sympathy and interest. It was a retreat kept quiet by an invalid

mother, and yet full of liberty to the few who, like Alan Dunlop, Tom Caledon, Desdemona Fanshawe (she had long resumed her maiden name), and others had the *entrée*. Alan believed the more strongly in his own theories when that fair face looked up in his, and he read in those steadfast eyes the loyal faith of recent conversion.

“A beautiful dream!” she repeated. “The dream of a noble mind. But, oh! Alan, I cannot bear to think of you breaking your heart against the rocks of ignorance and stupidity.”

“Ignorance,” he replied, “we can overcome: stupidity may be met with patience. What I fear most is habit. That is the greatest enemy of all progress.”

“But how can you live at the Court and yet live as a labouring man?”

“I shall not live at the Court; I shall leave it, and take a house in the village.”

“And never come out of it at all, Alan? Never come up here to see me? Not come and dine here, as you do now?”

He hesitated.

“What I want to do, Miranda, is to live in all respects as a labouring man may, upon his wages. If I come up here to dine, it would be a temptation in the way of luxury. I shall earn, I suppose, a pound or eighteen shillings a week. That will have to do for me. I think you must not ask me to dine here. But I will come up sometimes on Sunday mornings if you like, and report progress.”

Miranda sighed. She was prepared to see her chief friend and adviser resign all—but herself. That was a practical outcome to the new theories of life which she had never contemplated. Life would be dull indeed without Alan Dunlop to enliven it.

The requisites of a prophet are, first, to believe in yourself; secondly, to believe in your theory; thirdly, to believe in your people. Alan Dunlop possessed all these requisites. As an English gentleman, he had the hereditary belief in himself, so that to stand in the front was, he felt, his proper

place. He had retained this belief, and even strengthened it during the three years at Oxford, and subsequently while travelling round the world. He had thought so long over the duties which rise out of the responsibilities of wealth, that he was by this time as profoundly convinced of his mission as Moses or Mahomet; and, lastly, he had a firm belief in the latent power of the common people for imbibing new ideas presented in the right way.

“Could you, Miranda,” he asked once, in half-hesitating tones, “could you too give up this atmosphere of delicate culture, and change it for that of village life among the villagers?”

“I could not, Alan,” she replied frankly. “I love to read about noble things and self-sacrifice. It is one of the pleasures of life to feel one’s heart glow over some glorious tale. But the details, when one comes to realise them—think of living among the labourers’ wives—— Oh, Alan!”

“No,” he said, with a sigh, “I suppose you could not.”

“ Had he proposed to her and been refused ?” she thought when he went away. “ Surely she had not refused him ?”

“ *Il y a toujours un qui aime et un qui est aimé.*” There were once two children. One was a boy, and one was a girl. The boy, who was named Alan Fontaine, was three years older than the girl, who was called Miranda Dalmeny. Their houses were half a mile apart. The boy was born at Weyland Court, and the girl at Dalmeny Hall. The former stood in a great park, the latter in nothing but its own gardens ; but it overlooked Weyland Park ; and the property belonging to its owner was almost as great as that enjoyed by Lord Alwyne Fontaine in right of his wife. Both owners, Alan’s mother and Miranda’s father, died. The boy and girl became heir and heiress. Alan Fontaine became Alan Dunlop, and for miles on either side of Weyland Park the broad acres of their lands marched side by side.

They grew up together, shared the same sympathies, had the same vague yearnings

for that glorious future which is the dream of generous youth, when all noble things seem possible, and we are as yet but dimly conscious of that heritage of evil which, like Setebos, troubles all. They communicated their thoughts to each other, dwelling always on the plans of the after years. They read in the great library of Weyland Court strange old books which filled their minds with thoughts, not of the nineteenth century; and they rode about the country together, this new Paul with a new Virginia, talking, thinking, and dreaming poetry, sentiment, and enthusiasm.

When Miranda was eighteen Alan was twenty-one, and just returning from Oxford. By this time the girl had, after the fashion of her sex at that age, left off telling her thoughts, and kept them locked up in her own brain, waiting and accumulating until the arrival of the man with a right to them. Alan, as men will, went on telling his.

After his unsuccessful attempt to improve the village by lectures, Alan went away on his journey round the world. It

was, at first, very dull for Miranda at the Hall. Then Lord Alwyne persuaded Desdemona to go and stay with her as a sort of companion, and she went to town for the season, which was a diversion. At least, it would have been a diversion but for one thing. Her beauty, which was considerable, was naturally enhanced and set off by her income. A girl whose rent-roll is told by thousands is an object of general interest in herself, even if she has a face like a door-knocker. And at first it went to her heart to refuse the young men, who took every opportunity, in conservatories, at dinner-tables, in the park, at garden-parties, at balls, and even in church, to offer their hands and hearts. They were so deeply in earnest, they felt so profoundly the enormous advantages of hanging up their hats in Dalmeny Hall, they had a respect so unfeigned for the beauty, the intellect, the desirable qualities of the girl who owned so splendid a property, that poor Miranda felt guilty, with shame to herself for being so insensible, when they

stammered forth the customary words and she had to send them away sorrowful. But when they came in swarms, when the memory of Impecuniosus the First, dismissed with sorrow and some sort of shame, was driven away by the advent of Impecuniosus the Forty-First; when she had learned all the various methods pursued by men who propose, and experience had taught her the best form of refusal, viz., that which leaves no room for hope, she ceased to pity her suitors, and even began to ridicule them to Desdemona and Lord Alwyne; grew hard-hearted, cut short the aspirant at the very first words, and sent him away without expressing the least sympathy. Everybody knew and everybody said, that her heart was given to Alan Dunlop, the queer, wild enthusiast of Oxford, who headed the road-makers. Certain it is that her happiest days were those when, from some far-off foreign place, a letter came to her in the well-known handwriting. And equally certain it is that wherever she went, there was always present the youthful form

and face of Lord Alwyne, warding off the undesirable *partis*, protecting his ward against the wiles of the impecunious.

In the fulness of time, Alan came home rich with the spoils of all the world. There was no word of love between them before he went away. Among the many hundred letters he wrote from various habitable points upon this sphere, there was no word of love ; and when he came back, there was again no word of love. Miranda said that Alan was a brother to her. Probably Alan might have thought much in the same way of Miranda, with the difference, however, that the fondest brother contemplates the possibility of his sister's marriage without a pang, while Alan never for a moment imagined how he could get on without her.

Had she actually refused him? A burning spot rose in either cheek as she thought this over. But no ; she remembered all her wooers and their ways. She recalled the signs, which she knew too well, of an intention to propose. They

were alike in substance, though they differed in detail. There was the ardent but diffident young clerk in the Foreign Office, who laid himself with pitiful abasement at her feet, and there was the proud and penniless peer who confidently proposed the exchange of a title for a rent-roll. But in Alan's question there was nothing of all this; neither doubt, nor anxiety, nor emotion of any kind—only a plain question.

To live among the wives and daughters of the labourers! Could she do this? Not even, she felt, for that which Lord Alwyne had told her in the boat under the Clieveden woods was the one thing which he hoped for his son. Dear old Lord Alwyne! always so kind and thoughtful. And, oh! so very fond of saying pretty things to pretty girls. Other pretty girls, Miranda thought, with a little pang of jealousy, would have those pretty things said to them. And what would become of Alan's self-sacrifice? Would that go on all his life? Was he to be separated from her by

half a mile of park and village, and yet to belong to her no more ?

As for Alan himself, he was far indeed from asking for Miranda's hand. There had occurred to him for a moment only a beatific vision, in which he and Miranda—brother and sister labourer—should be living in the village among "the people," belonging to them : he to the men, and she to the women, so that while he introduced new ideas and combated old habits among one sex, she might be among the others, inculcating the arts of cleanliness, order, good temper, or the rudiments of that sweet culture which, in a very few years' time, was to make a home of delight in every cottage, and to form a West-end club, except for the drink and luxurious living, and the cigars and the easy-chairs, in every village. But the vision was momentary. It faded before Miranda's resolute reply, and he walked away sorrowful. He would have to fight the battle single-handed.

Among the farms on his estate was one

of three hundred acres, leased by a certain Stephen Bostock. It was the smallest—it was the lowest rented, the least productive, and the tenants were the least satisfactory of any upon his estate. He went to Stephen Bostock himself. He pointed out, having ascertained these facts from his agent, that he, Stephen Bostock, was getting deeper every year in the mire, that he had no money, that things were certain to get worse with him instead of better, and then he asked him what he proposed to do.

Stephen Bostock was a man with a very red face, as many rustics have, and a very long, square chin, as few rustics have. The red face was due to habitual intemperance, whenever he could find the money; the long, square chin was a mark and certain proof of cunning, obstinacy, and self-reliance. A long chin means tenacity—a square chin means resource. When you get them both together, you have such a man as Stephen Bostock.

Stephen Bostock was between forty and fifty years of age. He who has made no

money at fifty never will make any. That is why a man of forty-five who has made none begins to grow anxious. Stephen Bostock had nothing in the world except the lease of a farm whose rent he could not pay, a dairy whose proceeds kept the house supplied with meat and drink, and a wife and daughter who looked after the dairy, kept chickens and ducks, and saw that the pigs were fed. He was a small tenant-farmer, one of the most hopeless class, rapidly becoming rarer, in this realm of England. If the land were their own, they could live on it, thrive on it, work on it, and be happy. But it is not, and so the class deteriorates, starves for a while, becomes bankrupt, either sinks back to the soil, or goes to Canada, where free-lands can be taken up, and men become at a stroke yeomen, after the fashion of their ancestors.

“You see, Bostock,” said Alan, “things seem getting worse instead of better with you.”

“Yes, sir,” he replied, “they certainly

be. A little ease in the rent, now, might make everything right."

"No, it would not," Alan went on; "nothing will make everything right with you. The land is suffering from starvation and neglect. You have no stock, and next to no horses. You have got through all your money, whatever that was, and nothing can save you."

"A good spell o' rainy weather," began Stephen, his mind turning feebly in the direction of turnips.

"No, no," said the Squire. "Now listen to me, Bostock. Suppose I were to take the lease off your hands—don't speak, but listen. Suppose I were to offer you to remain where you are, in your own house, not as tenant of the farm, but its bailiff, on a salary?"

"Oh!" said Stephen, startled, "on a celery" (he pronounced it so), "and in my own house! Without rent? As bailiff! Ah!"

"On a salary to be fixed between us." (Stephen resolved that, if it depended on

him, it should be fixed pretty high.) “And that you should look after the practical business of the farm, which I intend to work on my own plans: that you should faithfully fulfil your part of the contract; that is, buy and sell, arrange the rotation of the crops, and direct the labour of the farm, to the best advantage of the proprietor, exactly as if it was your own.”

Here Stephen Bostock, who began by staring hard, comprehended the position, and that so suddenly, that he was compelled to produce a red cotton handkerchief to hide a grin which, despite every warning of politeness, *would* spread from ear to ear.

“A celery; manage the farm for the Squire; go on living in the house, rent-free; buy and sell for the best advantage—ho! ho!—for the best advantage of the farm.”

It really was too much.

Was it real?

Yes; before him stood the young Squire with grave and resolute face, square brows, and solemn blue eyes—eyes which some-

how took the grin out of the corners of his mouth, and enabled him to lay down the pocket-handkerchief.

“Let me hear it all over again,” he said. “I’m slow by nature, but I’m sure. I am to live, rent free”—that was his own addition—“in the farmhouse. That’s the first thing. I’m slow, but when I tackle a thing, I do tackle that thing. I am to sell the lease for a consideration.” That was also his own addition.

“Not at all,” said Alan. “You will not sell the lease; you will give it to me, to escape bankruptcy.”

Mr. Bostock made a face. Nobody likes the ugly word bankruptcy.

“Well,” he said, “you will have your joke, Mr. Dunlop. We’ll say that I surrender the lease, not sell it. But I am to get something, I suppose. I am to give up the lease, am I? And then I am to be bailiff. On a celery. And what might be your opinion of the celery that I should be worth as bailiff to this farm?”

“I have hardly thought about it,” said

Alan. Of course, a hundred a year would have been plenty for such a man. "But we might begin with two hundred."

"*And* fifty, if *you* please, Mr. Dunlop," said Mr. Bostock firmly. "And then we shall be going dirt cheap—dirt cheap. Two hundred and fifty, or three hundred. I think I ought to say a celery of four hundred. But, knowing you and your family as I do know you and your family, and having been a tenant for a many years, and my wife once lady's-maid to her ladyship, and all, makes one inclined to cut down the figure."

"We will say, then, two hundred and fifty," said Alan. He was accustomed to make this sort of compromise, and thought it showed the prudence of a business man. The other contractor to an agreement, for instance, whoever he was, invariably asked him for three times what he ought to have demanded. Alan conceded twice, and congratulated himself on having shown extraordinary knowledge of the world. Then he offered the wily Bostock two hundred

and fifty, when he might have got him for a hundred.

“Well,” Bostock grumbled, “to please you, sir. But we must have the dairy, and a field for the cows, and the fowls, and the pigs, and the orchard, jest as at present so arranged.”

“You can have all those,” said Alan, ignorantly adding another hundred to the new bailiff’s salary.

“That,” said Bostock, “won’t make the celery none too high. Besides, the dairy and the pigs is a mere nothink. But there—— And when will you begin, sir?”

“As soon as I can,” said Alan. “I am going”—here he hesitated a little—“to manage this farm on an entirely new principle, of which I will explain the details afterwards. That is, you will manage it, but the results of the farm—the profits—are to be applied on a new principle.”

“I thought, sir,” said Bostock—his face lengthened considerably at the prospect of the farm being managed on new principles—“I thought that I was to buy

and to sell for the best advantage of the farm.”

“ Why, so you are. That is not what I mean.”

“ Oh !” said Bostock, relieved ; “ that is not what you mean, sir ?”

“ Not at all. You will really buy, sell, and do everything. You will be the responsible manager of the farm. The profits, however, deducting your salary first, and the necessary expenses of wages, stock, implements, and so forth, will be divided in certain proportions between myself and the farm labourers and you, as the bailiff.”

Once more Mr. Bostock was obliged to take out that pocket-handkerchief, with which he blew his nose violently, choked, became crimson in the face, blew his nose again, choked again, and finally, resumed his calm.

“ Oh !” he said ; “ the profits of the farm, after paying me, the bailiff, and the wages and the necessary expenses, will go to us all in proper proportions, will they ? Well, sir, that’s a most generous and liberal offer

on your part. I don't think there's another Squire in all the country, as knows land as you know land—because you've been round the world and must know all the land as is fit to call itself land—no, not a single other Squire alive as would make that proposal. Mr. Dunlop, I'm with you, and if you'll shake the hand of a honest man"—he held out his horny paw—"there you are."

Alan took it, almost with tears.

"I believe you will serve the farm honestly and well, Bostock," he said.

"I will, sir," replied the new bailiff. "Look round you and see the improvements I've made already with my small means. Why am I a poor man now and my neighbours rich? Because I put into that land what they take out of it. Look at the farm implements—you'll buy them at a valuation, of course; I'll value them for you. Look at the horses and the stock, look at the machines, look at the fields. People come—ah! for miles round—to visit this farm. It's been in print. Bostock's Farm, they called it. And after all these

years, there's the rent unpaid, and—I'm not ashamed to say it, because the money's in the land, not in the bank—I go out of it, and become the bailiff at a salary of two hundred and fifty, paid weekly, which is five pounds a week, and a house rent-free, and the dairy and a field for the cows, and the pigs, and the orchard, and the farm stock at my valuation. Squire, you've got me dirt cheap. I don't grudge the bargain, because my heart's in the work, and I shall have no more trouble about rent, and give my whole mind to the farm. You'll have to spend a little money on the place," he added, waving his hands with the air of one who commands. "But, Lord! it will all come back to you. Only you wait till we've been at work for a year or so. A little money here and a little there, a steam-engine here and another there. More cattle, more horses. Mr. Dunlop, I believe," he cried in a burst of enthusiasm, "I believe you'll say, come this day five years, that you never did a better stroke of work in all your life than when you got ME,

Stephen Bostock, to be your bailiff, dirt cheap. It isn't for me to say who's the best man in all the county. Go to Athelston and ask at the farmers' ordinary on market-day. And all I've got to say is—here am I, at your service. Trust everything to me; let me, Stephen Bostock, buy and sell all by myself for the best advantage of the farm, as you say, Mr. Dunlop, and no questions asked, nor interference, nor anything, and—and then wait for the profits to be divided between you and me and the labourers. It's the labourers," he added, after a pause, "that I think on most, not myself, nor you. You've got your rents, Mr. Dunlop. You're a gentleman. I've got my salary—on'y two hundred and fifty, but 'sufficient is enough to a contented mind, and better is a stalled ox with contentment than a dinner of herbs and strife therewith.' But they pore labourers, they've got nothing, only their wages. Well, sir, we'll make it up to them. You and me together, we will."

There was something contagious in the hearty, though vulgar, enthusiasm of the new bailiff, and Alan shook hands with him with effusion. When the Squire was gone the bailiff, after watching him carefully across a field and a half, sat down and resumed openly that broad grin which he had before concealed behind the handkerchief.

“Me to buy and sell,” he said. “*And* the two hundred and fifty! *And* rent free! *And* the dairy! *And* the pigs! *And* the cows! And all to the best advantage of the farm. Dammit, it’s fine!” he said this critically. “That’s what it is—it’s fine.” He lay back, and laughed low and long. Then a sudden thought pierced the marrow of his heart, and he sat up again.

“How long will it last? One year? Two years? Stephen Bostock, my lad, make hay while the sun shines. Buy and sell as much as you can to the best advantage. Ho! ho!—the best advantage—ha! ha!—of the farmer—ho! ho!—

and the labourers—ha! ha!—the labourers! Yar!” He added the last words with the most profound contempt, which it was as well that Alan did not witness.



CHAPTER VIII.

“That monster, Custom, who all sense doth eat.”

AFTER this gratifying interview with farmer Bostock, Alan felt himself warranted in at once proceeding to business. Pending the signing of the agreement, which the honest bailiff undertook to get drawn up, he began by inviting the labourers on the farm to meet him on Saturday evening at the schools, when, after supper, he proposed to set forth in simple language, cautiously abstaining from eloquence or metaphor, his scheme for the advance of the higher civilisation.

The men were invited to bring their wives, and those of the women whose family ties allowed, accepted with as much

readiness as the men. Here, it was felt, was a distinct step in advance. On the last occasion when the Squire met them in the schoolroom, he offered them a lecture, and never so much as a glass of beer to wash it down. Now, whatever suffering might be in store for them in the way of speeches, one thing was quite clear, that there would be compensation in the way of meat and drink. The butcher and the landlord of the Spotted Lion, indeed, were ready to state what amount of compensation.

“The supper,” said one of the group in the Spotted Lion, on Friday evening, “is roast beef, and roast mutton, hot, with potatoes and cabbage.”

“Ah!” from all lips sympathetically.

“And beer. As much beer as we like. None o’ your half-pints with young Squire. I seen the Squire’s orders in writing.”

“Ah!”—unanimously.

“Seems a kind of a waste now, don’t it?” asked a venerable sage, smoking in the corner. “Saturday night an’ all.

Might ha' bin here as usual, and had the beer to ourselves, and kep' the beef for Sunday."

That was true, and feelingly put.

"And there's a lecture, William?" the ancient sage went on. "Same as two year ago."

"Ay. There's a lecture. But, Lord! after the beef—and the cabbage—and the beer—what's a lecture?"

Alan presided at the supper, supported by the Vicar on his right, and his new bailiff on the left. When every one had eaten as much beef as he possibly could, and the cloth was removed, the men were agreeably surprised by the production of pipes, tobacco, and more beer. The place, to be sure, was not what they were accustomed to for smoking purposes, and the tobacco did not possess some of the qualities which they preferred; but there was always the beer.

The women began to steal away when the pipes were lit, and by the time the room was quite full of smoke and the

Squire was choking, there were none but men present. Then Alan rose to make the speech which inaugurated his co-operative farm.

He saw with a sinking heart that they immediately assumed the attitude which long custom at church made them put on for the reception of a discourse. That is to say, they leaned back in their chairs, left off talking—some of them put down their pipes out of respect—and with eyes fixed upon the rafters, allowed their thoughts to wander in pleasant fields. There was, to be sure, a freshness in being allowed to drink beer and smoke during a sermon.

“My friends—” Here there was a general shuffling of legs, as every man helped himself hastily to another glass of gratuitous beer, the idea emanating from the aged philosopher. It might be—it would certainly be—their last that evening, because no doubt when the sermon was finished they would all be dismissed with the benediction given, so to speak, dry, as on Sunday.

“ My friends—” Alan gave them time to recover and began again. “ I have asked you here to-night, not, as happened two years ago, to deliver a lecture, but to ask your advice.” He paused here, and looked round, but on no single face did he discern the least gleam or glimmer of interest. Every man’s eyes were steadily fixed on the roof, and every man was quietly but resolutely smoking, his mind, of course, in some more congenial place.

This was disheartening. Alan tried again.

“ My friends,” he said once more, “ I want to ask your advice. I stand among you, the owner of this land, and the receiver of its rents.”

“ Hear! hear!” cried Mr. Bostock ; and at an interruption so uncommon in a sermon, many of the hearers recovered consciousness suddenly, and found themselves not in church at all, but in the school-room. Then they realised the position, and relapsed again.

“ An owner of land and a receiver of

rents," Alan went on, "occupies a position which, I believe, is only beginning to be generally recognised. He incurs responsibilities, in fact, of the most serious kind."

He paused again. There was no gleam of sympathy in any single eye. But that might be the effect of the tobacco haze.

"The conditions of agriculture are, in this country," he went on, "very different to those in any of the places I have visited. In all countries except England, men farm their own land. Mostly, they farm it with their own hands. Here we have not only the owner, a man of capital, but also the tenant farmer, another man of capital, to come between the labourer and the profits of his labour. That is a state of things which we cannot entirely alter, but may modify."

He stopped again. A low and melodious snore from the end of the table where one of the younger members had fallen asleep, increased his auditors' belief that they were really in church.

"An owner of land in England," Alan

continued, "is a trustee; he is a responsible agent; he holds a large part of the public welfare in his hands. It is his duty to leave no stone unturned in the effort to secure the largest amount of happiness attainable by the general mass of mankind."

He thought that short sentences, delivered slowly, would have the effect of arresting the attention, and though the entire silence (except the single snore) and apparent apathy with which his words had hitherto been received were disheartening, yet he hoped that when he got through his preamble the men would receive his intentions with enthusiasm.

"I start, therefore, with the grand modern principle that labour must be paid a sufficient wage to keep the labourer and his family in health. So far, no doubt, you are all agreed."

Not a soul made the slightest response.

"Next, I advance the grand new principle in social economy that the labourers in any enterprise are entitled, in addition to their wages, to a share in the profits."

“Hear! hear!” from Mr. Bostock, which brought down the upward-turned faces. When, however, they found that the sermon was not finished, the faces all went up again.

“I am about to ask your assistance,” Alan went on, “in the establishment of a farm conducted on these and other new principles. I have taken the farm previously held by our friend Mr. Bostock, and have undertaken to put the general management into his hands as bailiff. The details of this management I leave to you for settlement among yourselves.”

“Hear! hear!” from Mr. Bostock.

The faces came down again, and looked wonderingly around them. They were all lost in the sleepy imaginations which belong to sermon-time: they were full of fat mutton and heavy beer: they were not—then—in church: and there was the Squire boomin’ away. What was it all about?

“I propose that you hold a weekly Parliament in this room, every Saturday night, for the discussion of all and every topic con-

nected with the farm. You will understand that on your own decisions will rest the prosperity of the undertaking and your own chances of profit.

“As regards the profits of the farm, I shall take for my own share a percentage to represent five per cent. on the marketable value: the bailiff will receive a salary of two hundred and fifty pounds: your own wages will, of course, have to come out of the annual returns: there will be a percentage set aside for wear and tear of farm implements: and then—then—my friends, we shall divide between us all the remaining profits. I, as the landlord, will take a certain share: the bailiff, as superior officer and manager, his share: the rest will be divided among you equally.”

There was not the slightest enthusiasm—not the least response; all the faces turned swiftly upwards contemplating the rafters—everybody silent out of respect. You don't interrupt a parson in a pulpit by singing out “Hear! hear!” or any such foolishness. Not at all—you sit and listen,

and when he has done, you go away. As for what he has said, that is his affair, not yours.

Alan was a good deal disappointed, but he persevered.

“You will elect your own officers, appoint your own hours of labour, provide for everything by free discussion and voting. For my own part,” here he sank his voice, and spoke solemnly, because this was the real pith and gist of the whole thing, “I shall ask you to let me become one of yourselves, work with you, eat and drink with you, share your toil as well as your recreation, and contribute from the better chances I have had of acquiring knowledge all I can that may be helpful to the new community.”

The faces came down when the voice dropped, because it was thus that the Vicar always ended his sermons. So that all heard the Squire, to their unspeakable astonishment, offering to live with them, work with them, and eat and drink with them. “Finally,” he said, “I think, con-

sidering the advantages that we possess : a bailiff who takes a salary instead of a profit"—here Stephen Bostock pulled out his pocket-handkerchief to conceal the grin which once more involuntarily played round his honest lips—"a landlord who wants no more than a small percentage on the value of the farm, and a knot of hard-working, disciplined, and—and—intelligent men like yourselves—I think, I say, that we may begin by raising the wages three shillings all round."

Here the Squire sat down, and the men stared at him.

Three shillings all round. That they understood, and the fact, once fairly understood, sent their dull blood coursing more swiftly through their veins. Three shillings a week ! Eighteen pints of beer ! But the possibilities of such an increase cannot be grasped in a moment.

Alan rose again when the emotion had subsided, and pulled out a small bundle of papers. They were fly-leaves, on which the principal points of his speech had been

printed in clear type and in a few words. He put them upon the table.

“Now,” he said, “let this be the first evening Parliament of the new community! I leave these papers with you, so that you may understand, by reading them, exactly what it is that I propose, by your help, to institute. We shall now leave you to your deliberations. Pray send for any more beer that you may require.”

The Vicar, Mr. Bostock, and the Squire gone, the men, alone and comfortable, looked at each other with mazed and turbid understandings.

“What did he say, William?” asked the same old sage who had lamented the loss of a Saturday night and the waste of good beef.

“Three shillin’ a week,” replied William. “And the Squire, he’ll come and live along of us.”

“We don’t want no Squire,” growled the blacksmith.

“And Farmer Bostock, he’s to be bailiff.”

There was another growl.

Then William, a young man, spoke again.

“Squire said we was to have what beer we wanted. How much do we want?”

One suggested a pint all round ; another, and a thirstier, rose to a pint and a half. There were about fifteen men present. William, with a boldness which marked him out for future success, soared higher.

“ Let’s hev’ a cask,” he said.

As there were fifteen men present, that was about three quarts apiece. The cask was brought, and instantly tapped. The deliberations were conducted as long as it lasted, which was at least three hours.

No conclusions were arrived at. But the imagination was let loose upon the Squire’s future manner of life, and how his father would like it.

“ William,” presently asked the old man, “ they papers as the Squire left on the table. What’s they for ?”

“ Pipe-lights, gaffer,” replied William promptly.

“ Oh ! and very thoughtful of the Squire, too. Reach me one, William.”

This, alas ! was the end of the Squire’s little tract.



CHAPTER IX.

“Strong reasons make strong actions.”

THE cottage in which Alan proposed to carry out his project was one of the humblest in the village. It consisted of two rooms ; that on the ground-floor opening directly on the little front garden, and paved with stone, was ten feet square and eight feet high. That on the floor above was of the same superficial area, but had a sloping roof, so that the cubical contents were much smaller. In fact, it was a room in which a man would hesitate to swing a cat, from the dreadful uncertainty whether the cat might not clutch the walls and turn to rend him. The room was lighted by a small window containing two panes only.

“You must have a curtain across the door, Alan,” said Miranda, inspecting the arrangements. “I will make it for you of some cheap stuff, so that it may be copied by the village. A flower-box may be put in the window for mignonette and wall-flowers. You may put a little bookcase opposite the window. And, for very comfort’s sake, you must have some carpet over the cold stones. I can’t very well send you blankets at Christmas, Alan, can I? Let me send you a piece of carpet instead — oh! good serviceable carpet; Kidderminster, not Turkey carpet at all.”

“I have been thinking,” said Alan, “that one way of getting to understand these people, will be by asking them here and giving them tea, with—with jam, I suppose, and so forth.”

It was not till she was alone that Miranda felt a temptation to laugh over the picture of the peasants eating their way to the Higher Culture through piles of jam. They agreed that, as regards the furniture, simplicity must be studied first, and that

æsthetic effect must be practically made of secondary importance. They fixed upon a wooden arm-chair, a deal table, unvarnished, and two or three common strong chairs for the coming visitors who were to eat jam. The bookcase presented difficulties. Should it be fitted for the use of the village, or for that of the Squire? It was with a sigh that Alan pronounced for the village, and filled it with works on practical husbandry, political economy, agricultural chemistry, and other works known to be in constant demand by English villagers.

“I must devote my evenings, as well as my days, Miranda,” said Alan, on the eve of taking up his residence in the village, “to the people. But I shall be able to see you on Sundays.”

“And, Alan, may I come to see you—in the fields?”

Alan laughed.

“You may, if you like. You will find me in a smock-frock.”

“A smock-frock? You, Alan?”

Somehow the question of dress goes

home to the feminine mind with greater force and directness than to ourselves. Miranda would have preferred seeing her new Crusader cap-à-pié in chain armour. But in a smock-frock !

Alan laughed.

“The uniform came home last night,” he said. “In the solitude of my own chamber I put it on. Stay, Miranda. No one is about. Suppose I go and put it on again, for you.”

He disappeared for a few minutes, and presently returned, disguised as a British labourer. He had on a smock-frock, a soft felt hat, leggings, gaiters, and corduroy trousers. He carried a whip in his hand, and wore a red cotton handkerchief tied round his neck. No one knows, until he has tried it, how vast a gulf separates those who wear from those who do not wear a collar.

“Alan !” cried Miranda, in a sort of terror, “I am afraid of you. Is it possible for clothes to make all that difference ? You look *exactly* like a rustic. Even your

own air of distinction, that I was proud of, has disappeared. I believe clothes are live things, after all. To be sure, everything is new, and if you only had a rose in your buttonhole, you would pass for a villager at the opera. But go away quickly, and change before any of the servants see you. If they do, your authority is lost."

Alan took possession of his new house with pride mixed with anxiety. Like all genuine enthusiasts, he had very little care about what people said of him. That did not enter into his calculations. The pride arose from the realisation of a dream which had lain in his brain for two years and more; the anxiety from a fear that he might not be strong enough to carry it out. A woman whom he had engaged to wait upon him was in the cottage to receive him.

"You have got everything as I ordered?" Alan asked. "Breakfast such as the men all take; things [for luncheon — I mean, dinner?"

Everything, she [said, had been pro-

vided. Thus assured, Alan dismissed her.

It was eight o'clock and a cold rainy evening in October. The fire was burning, and the room was illuminated by a single tallow candle in a brass candlestick. The village was very quiet, and the rain fell outside, pattering upon his doorstep, cheerless. The sensation of being quite alone in a house, even a two-roomed cottage, was chilly. And there was the voluntary deprivation of tobacco, which was to begin from that evening. Abstinence from strong drinks, too, was to commence on the spot. Alan sat and meditated. He tried to picture to himself a village where the people were all cultured, all virtuous, all happy. He tried to lay down for himself laws to guide his conversation with the men, his daily toil, and his evenings. But it was an unpropitious time. For the moment, he took no joy in his projects. In all undertakings of difficulty, that moment is the most unhappy when it has been resolved upon, and on the eve of com-

mencement, because then the dangers stare you most clearly in the face, and success seems most doubtful.

Ten o'clock. He was to rise early, and had better go to bed. He climbed the narrow stairs, bumped his head once or twice against the sloping roof and went to bed, feeling exactly like Alexander Selkirk. He woke in the night choked with the confined air of the little room. It was dark; he had no matches, and could not open the window. With the aid of a brush he smashed a pane of glass, and having thus established a simple ventilator, went to bed again.

He awoke at six, an hour late. Then a touch of human weakness seized him. He would not begin his farm-work that day. Next day he would be called in time. And, he thought, as he was awake, he would get up. No one to bring him hot water, no hot water to bring; no use in ringing the bell, no bell to ring. He felt more and more like Alexander Selkirk. Alas! he

reflected, no fire lit, and breakfast to be made by himself.

Downstairs, he threw open the shutter and began with a foolish shame lest any one should see him,—to be sure it was not an occupation which offers, at the first blush, many attractions,—to lay the fire. This is not difficult to do, but it requires delicacy in the handling, and there are certain details, such as the sweeping up of the cinders, which, although a part of honourable labour, is not the work one would wish to do in public. You have to go on your knees to do it properly; no man likes that kind of attitude, unless he is at Wimbledon. The fire kindled, it was necessary to boil the kettle for breakfast. Fortunately, the kettle was full. He had only, therefore, to put it on, lay out the things for breakfast, and take that meal.

When the fire was lit, he began to feel in better spirits. Of course there would be hardships. That was to be expected. Many sorts of hardships. For instance, was not there a certain—hem!—an earthi-

ness, a mouldy odour about the room, which he had failed to notice the night before? Perhaps, if he opened the door,—he did so; outside, the rain was still pattering on his doorstep, and standing in great pools about the road. Clay soil, stone floor, ground heavy with rain,—these were the generators of his mouldiness. He made a mental note anent foundations. Good; the kettle must be nearly boiling now; let us set out breakfast.

No tablecloth; bread—where is the butter? where is the milk? tea; the teapot; the sugar—brown sugar. Nothing else? no bacon? no kidneys? nothing else at all? Do labourers make their breakfast off bread and tea, with brown sugar and no milk? Stay. In the corner there is something white lying on a plate. He set this down on the table and contemplated it with dismay.

Yet he had pledged himself to live like the farm labourers.

A piece of cold boiled pork, only the fat, not a morsel of lean—a lump of white,

hard, unredeemed fat. Do our agricultural workmen, then, habitually devour the fat of pigs?

He took up a knife and fork, resolved to conquer this luxurious distaste for pork fat. He laid it down. Again, and with the same result.

Then he sighed. At what a price must his end be attained! Perhaps the kettle was boiling. There were none of the signs—no bubbling and running over. He poured a little into a cup. Heavens! it was hardly warm. He sat down with some temper; not the broad facts of disinterested devotion, but these little details worry and annoy one.

He drew his chair to the side of the fire. If he kept the door open he would catch cold; if he shut it, there was that abominable mouldiness. Patience. Let the kettle boil.

The warmth of the fire, the early hour, the exertion of laying the fire, each of these influences falling singly and together upon him, presently caused his eyes to close.

The fire having made the kettle to boil, went on, in its zeal to do the work thoroughly, until it had boiled all the water away. Then it got the opportunity, which it never neglects, of burning a hole in the bottom of the kettle. By-and-by the door, which was unfastened, swung gently open, and the rain began to beat in upon Alan's new carpet. Then a cat, belonging to a neighbouring cottage, crept in softly, and sat down before the fire, pretending to have made a mistake about the house. As the sleeper took no notice, she rose and began slowly to explore the room in quest of breakfast for herself, if any were to be had. Nothing in the cupboard, nothing on the floor. On the table a piece of pork fat and a loaf of bread. The cat turned the pork over with her paws, smelt it, and finally, digging her teeth into a corner of the skin, jumped lightly to the ground with it and disappeared. But Alan went on sleeping.

Then two little boys, of three and four, looked in at the door. I do not know

where they came from, but realising the situation—somebody sound asleep, rain and cold outside—they crept in and sat on the carpet before the fire, warming their hands and feet. Presently one of them, the more enterprising one, began to prowling round the room, and espied a sugar-basin. This he stealthily brought to his companion, and both, sitting down before the fire, fell to upon the sugar, each keeping one eye on the sleeper, without the necessity of speech. When the sugar was quite gone, they gently rose, replaced the empty basin, and crept away on the points of their toes like stage brigands. But still the sleeping man slept on.

When the children were gone, the rain and wind beat in at the open door at their will without awakening the sleeper. Alan was in the land of dreams.

Then there came along the street an old woman. She was going to buy a loaf. Seeing the door of the cottage open, she looked in, with the curiosity of her sex, to see how the young Squire had furnished it.

He was there himself, asleep by the fire. Seeing that he really was asleep, and took no manner of notice, she was emboldened to look round the room. From looking about the room to stepping inside out of the rain was but a natural sequence of events. But it was not in the natural order of things that, while her eyes watched the face of the sleeper, her right hand, while the accomplice left held up the apron, should steal forth and convey the loaf beneath that feminine robe proper for concealment. When she was gone, Alan's breakfast-table was as bare as Dame Hubbard's cupboard.

The morning advanced. All the men had long since gone off to their work ; but now the women, whose household duties were by this time pretty well accomplished for the day, came out and began to gossip at the doors. And then the rumour ran from house to house that the Squire was in his cottage, that the cottage door was open, and the Squire was sound asleep inside, for all the world to see.

When Alan awoke, which was about half-past eight, he sat up in his chair and rubbed his eyes. Before him, gathered together at the open door of his cottage, were the whole feminine population, with all the children who could not yet walk. There was the ancient gammer, her face seamed and lined, and her shoulders bent. There was the strong and sturdy housewife, mother of many, one of whom she was brandishing. There was the newly-married wife, fresh from the wash-tub, the suds yet lying on her red arms. There was the maiden of blushing sixteen, carrying her infant brother. All were there; all were staring with open mouths and eyes, whispering, tittering, and waiting.

When he sat up they started back; when he opened his eyes they fled multivious; so that all he got was a mere sense, or dim half-photograph, of the scene, which might even have been a dream. But he heard the rustle of flying skirts and the skurry of retreating feet, and he divined what had happened.

But they ought not to have taken away his loaf, and his pork, and his sugar. That was carrying curiosity beyond its legitimate limits. And the fire was out, and the water had boiled away, and there was a great hole burnt in the bottom of the kettle. He looked round him in dismay. Up to the present he had succeeded in nothing but in making himself ridiculous.

Why is it, he asked, that a man will cheerfully bear insult, contempt, and misrepresentation, and yet fall into unphilosophic rages when he incurs ridicule? It was a question to which no answer came.

Meantime, what was he to do?

It was nine o'clock. He was hungry. He would consider this a day lost, and he would go over to Dalmeny Hall and ask for breakfast.



CHAPTER X.

“Methinks it were a happy life,
To be no better than a homely swain.”

“WELL, sir,” Bailiff Bostock said, “if you really do mean it, and will take and work with the men—— Do you mean it—just as you say, and no favour?”

“I mean just what I say. I shall begin to-morrow, and am here now to learn my duties for the day.”

Alan was determined there should be no more loss of a day.

“You can’t follow the plough, that wants practice; and you can’t manage the engine, that wants training.”

The bailiff rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

“There’s a stack of hay we’re going to cut into to-morrow; but I can’t send you

up the ladder, atop o' that great stack. Sure as twopence you'd fall down and break something. Can you drive, Squire?"

"Of course I can."

"Then I'll tell you what you shall do. It is a dirty job, too——"

"Never mind how rough it is."

"I think you will be able to manage it, for the first job, better than anything else. You come here to-morrow morning, at six sharp, and I'll find you a day's work, never fear."

With this assurance, Alan was fain to be content. He then proceeded, being thoroughly ashamed of the morning's fiasco, to guard against a repetition of it. With this view he hired a boy to call him at five sharp, got a ventilator for his bedroom, an alarum clock, which he set for five o'clock. He next purchased a new kettle, and provided such materials for breakfast as he would eat, deferring the cold pork until such time as he should become hardened to the bread of affliction.

It was five o'clock in the afternoon when

these arrangements were finally completed. He remembered that he had dinner to get, bought a beefsteak and potatoes, and proceeded, with such slender art as was at his command, to grill the former and boil the latter. The potatoes came out hard, but he had eaten horse-beefsteak in America.

Dinner over he sat down, and spent the evening in calculating how best he could live on eighteen shillings a week, with a little extra at harvest-time—say a guinea, all told. Rent, half-a-crown; clothes and boots, five pounds a year at least—say two shillings a week. Remained, sixteen shillings and sixpence for everything. Fuel, candles, soap, odds and ends, would carry away half-a-crown of this. Fourteen shillings left for food and savings; for Alan was resolute on showing the rustics how to save. Say eighteenpence a day for food.

Food. What is food? Half-a-crown goes at the club for luncheon alone with great ease. He would want, he thought, a pound of meat, half a dozen potatoes, and a loaf of bread every day. There is

eighteenpence gone at once. Tea, coffee, sugar, milk, butter, cheese, small groceries : all this had to come out of the odd sixpence. And how much would be left for saving ? Every penny would have to be looked at, every tea-spoonful of tea hesitated over. And then the washing. The male mind does not at first understand the meaning of this item. Now it occurred to him that unless, in the dead of night, and with barred doors, he did his own washing, this charge would be the last straw to break the camel's back. And yet, with the washing before their eyes, the labourers found money to spend at the Spotted Lion. It must come out of his meat. Overcome with the prospect, Alan folded up his paper and went to bed.

In the morning he had a beautiful dream. He was walking hand in hand with Miranda in a flowery meadow, in whose hedges highly-cultured peasants had planted geraniums, standard and monthly roses, rhododendrons, hydrangeas, dahlias, and the stately hollyhocks, which raised

their heads and blossomed among the hawthorn, honeysuckle, and straggling blackberry. Beneath them, on the banks, flowered mignonette, verbena, heliotrope, and all sorts of sweet flowers, growing apparently wild. The grass amid which they walked was luxuriant and long, and bright with buttercups and cowslips. Round them, as they walked hand in hand under a sunny sky, sat, walked, or played the villagers, engaged in various occupations, all of which demanded the Higher Culture. For one, clad in a smock-frock, scrupulously clean, was reading Mr. Pater's "Studies of the Renaissance;" another, similarly attired, was studying Darwin's "Descent of Man;" another, an older man, was sitting, brow bent, and pencil in hand, with which he made marginalia over Mill's "Political Economy;" a fourth was composing music; a fifth was collecting specimens in the hedges for a *hortus siccus*. Of the girls, three were standing together in the attitude of the Graces, only daintily attired, singing part songs, with clasped

hands ; some were making embroidery for their Sunday frocks, and one was reading Ruskin's "Fors Clavigera" aloud for the benefit of those who embroidered. Of the younger men, one in a corner by himself was declaiming, Shakespeare in hand ; another was airily reading that sweet, and simple, and musical poem called "Sordello," singing from its rippling measures as he brushed away the dew across the upland lawn ; another was correcting the proofs of a Note on the village archæology, which traced the connection of the parish pump with the Roman occupation—these proofs were destined for the *Academy* ; another was catching swiftly and deftly with brush and paper the ever-changing effects of cloud and sunshine on the river ; the blacksmith was writing a *villanelle* ; and the school-master was guessing a double acrostic. The elder ladies, assisted by the oldest inhabitant of the village, Methusalem Parr, were engaged in committing to paper the folk-lore of the district with a view of sending it to the editor of *Melusine*. Among

the *märchen* thus set down for the first time was a nursery story of a Pig, a Porcupine, and a Piper, which afterwards became famous, and was traced to the very foot of the Himalayas, where the inhabitants believed that it descended from Heaven. Just as Alan, in explaining to Miranda the honour and glory which this relic of old-world story would confer upon the village of Weyland, his dream grew a little troubled. The young men and the maidens got confused before his eyes; the meadow grew cloudy; the villagers all seemed to start asunder in terror; books, pens, pencils, all were thrown aside, and they fled multivious with oaths and shrieks, which were not loud and coarse, but low and cultured. Then the meadow changed itself into a small whitewashed room, there was no Miranda at all, and he was lying in his cottage bedroom, alone.

“Ting-a-ring-ting!”—was ever alarum more wildly irritating? He sprang from his bed and hurled a boot which silenced that alarum for ever.

Bang, bang, bang! "Five o'clock, master." That was the boy calling him. He composed his shattered nerves as well as he could, and proceeded to dress. It was with a mixture of foolish shame and pride that he put on his corduroys, button-up waistcoat, and clean white smock; these assumed, he descended the stairs, lit the fire, made his tea, managed to get through a little bread and butter—five o'clock is really too early for breakfast—tied his red handkerchief round his neck, put on his soft felt hat, and sallied forth a new Don Quixote. He naturally felt uncomfortable in his new garb: that was to be expected. And as he walked rapidly down the village street, along which the labourers were slouching along to their work, it was not pleasant to hear the rustics, whose sense of humour is naturally strongest when the point of the epigram refers to their own familiar pursuits, exploded as he passed, and choked respectfully.

In the farmyard, besides the usual belongings, was a cart and horse ready for

use, led by a boy. Bailiff Bostock, his own horse ready saddled, was waiting impatiently for Alan.

“Now, Squire,” he said, pointing to such a heap as might have come from the Augean stables, “you see that pile o’ muck. It’s got to be carted to the fields and spread out in little piles, same as you’ve often seen when you go out shooting.”

“I understand,” said Alan, his heart warming with the prospect of real work; “it’s got to be pitchforked into the cart, driven to the field, and pitchforked back again. Isn’t it boys’ work, Bailiff?”

The Bailiff grinned.

“Ask me that in half an hour,” he said, and, jumping into his saddle, rode off on the business of the day.

Alan rolled up the sleeves of his smock, and took up the pitchfork. The boy went behind the cart to grin. The smock-frock was white, and the job was so very, very likely to destroy that whiteness that the boy needs must go behind the cart to laugh. Had he not been afraid of the Squire he

would have told him that he should begin by taking off the smock and the smart waistcoat under it.

Then the job began. To handle a pitchfork, like other responsible work, requires practice. The crafty pitchforker grasps his instrument at some point experimentally ascertained to be that of least weight and greatest leverage. Had Alan been a Cambridge instead of an Oxford man, he would have known something of such points. But he was ignorant of mechanics, and had to find out for himself.

Half a dozen times that boy, who should have been on the shafts, assisting at the reception of the stuff, came from behind the shafts, each time to go back again and laugh as noiselessly as he could. Alan heard him, though he condoned the offence, considering the novelty of the thing.

The first time that boy looked round the cart the Squire was beginning to puff and pant ; the second time he looked, the Squire had pulled off his hat, and his

face was shining as the face of one in a Turkish bath; the third time he had thrown aside his red neckerchief and the perspiration was streaming from his brows. But still the Squire worked on. Never before had that boy seen a cart filled more swiftly.

“Now, boy,” he said good-humouredly, “when you have done laughing you may tell me where we have to take this load.”

The boy essayed to speak, but choked. The situation was altogether too funny. He could only point.

Alan drove the cart down one lane and up another without any disaster, the boy following behind him, still grinning as noiselessly as he knew. Then they came to their field, and the boy pointed to the spot where they had to begin. “This will be easy work,” said Alan, mounting the cart.

The task, indeed, was simple. Only to pitch out the manure in small heaps, standing in the cart.

The boy went to the horse's head

After the first heap was out—rather dexterously, Alan thought—the boy made a remarkable utterance :

“ O—osier !”

Instantly the cart went on, and Alan, losing his balance, was prostrated into the cart itself, where he lay supine, his legs kicking up. At this sight the boy broke down altogether and laughed, roaring, and bellowing, and weeping with laughter so that the welkin rang.

Alan got up rather ruefully. To be sure, it was absurd to quarrel with the boy for laughing. And yet the condition of that smock-frock from shoulder to hem ! Could the washing be included in the fourteen shillings ? He pitchforked the second pile out of the cart.

“ O—osier !” cried the boy, and the cart went on.

This time Alan fell on his hands and face. The front of the smock was now like the back, and the boy, who had a fine sense of humour, sat down on the ground for unreserved enjoyment of his laugh.

“Why the devil,” cried the Squire, “can’t you tell me when you are going on?”

“I did,” said the boy, “I said ‘O—osier.’”

Alan was silent, and resumed his work with greater care to preserve his balance at the word “O—sier.”

Just then the Bailiff rode into the field.

“Well, Squire,” he said, “boys’ work—eh?”

“Not quite.”

“Had a fall in the muck? Better have taken off your frock and your waistcoat, too. Live and learn, sir. Don’t you be too wasteful o’ the muck. That stuff’s precious. My missus, she says, if the Squire’ll drop in when he’s ready for a bite, she’ll be honoured.”

“Thank you, Bailiff. I am going to live as the men live.”

“What ha’ you got for your dinner, boy?”

“Bread and cheese.”

“What has your daddy got?”

“Bread and cheese.”

“You see, Squire, bread and cheese won't do for the likes of you. However, you have your own way. Have you got your dinner in your pocket, sir?”

“Why—no.”

“Now, sir, *do* you think we can afford the time for the labourer to go all the way home and back again for dinner?”

That argument was irresistible, and Alan went to the Bailiff's house, where he was relieved of the unlucky smock.

Mrs. Bostock gave him some boiled pork and greens, with a glass of beer. That was at twelve o'clock : never had he been so hungry.

After dinner, he fed the pigs. Then he was set weeding, which the Bailiff thought a light and pleasant occupation for an October afternoon.

“I can hardly sit up,” he wrote to Miranda that evening, “but I must tell you that I have done my first day's work. At present I have had no opportunity of con-

versing with the men, but that will come in due course, no doubt. My only companion to-day has been a boy who laughed the whole time. Good-night, Miranda.”



CHAPTER XI.

“The mansion’s self was vast and venerable :
With more of the monastic than has been
Preserved elsewhere : the cloisters still were stable,
The cells, too, and refectory, I ween.”

It is not to be understood that Alan was entirely satisfied with a lonely evening in a two-roomed cottage, or that he ceased altogether his visits at Dalmeny Hall. Occasionally, to be sure, but this was only at the beginning of his career as a peasant, he varied the monotony of the evening by inviting a brother farm-labourer to take supper with him. On these occasions the repast was of a substantial kind, accompanied by coffee, and followed by pipes. But it brought little joy, much less than might have been expected. The beefsteak was

eaten with hunger, but in manifest dis-ease; there was no camaraderie as between fellow-workers in the same noble cause; the coffee was accepted as a poor substitute for the beer of the Spotted Lion, and conversation flagged. Perhaps, Alan thought, there was some defect in his own mind which checked the sympathy necessary to bring out the full flavour of rustic society, and to enter into its inner soul. Else why should the talk be a series of questions on his part, and of answers on the other, like the Church Catechism? And why should his friend, departing at the earliest hour possible, manifest in his artless features a lively joy that he was now free to seek the shades of the Spotted Lion, and pour forth to friendly ears the complaint of a swain who found a supper too dearly bought at the cost of a night with the Squire.

Once, and only once, Alan ventured within the walls of the tavern. It was in the evening. A full parliament was assembled in the taproom. Every man had his pipe:

every man his mug of beer : the windows were close shut : the fire was burning brightly : the petroleum lamp was turned on full : and what with the beer, the tobacco, the smell of clothes drying slowly in the warm room—for outside it was raining—and the petroleum, the stench was like a London fog, inasmuch as it could be seen felt, and handled almost, as well as tasted.

When Alan appeared at the door, clad like themselves in corduroys with red handkerchief round his neck, he observed that the same expression gathered slowly, like a cloud rolling up from the west, upon every face. It was not a pleasant expression. There was astonishment in it : there was also disgust : and there was an attempt to force the perfunctory grin of welcome. For every man felt as if he was a schoolboy, and as if Alan was the master. What right, that expression said as plainly as looks can speak, what right had the Squire prying there ? As if it was not aggravation enough to have him always about.

Alan read the expression correctly. But he sat down and endeavoured to say pleasant things. The things were not received as pleasant things at all, but of quite the opposite kind. And, as no one would talk while he was there, he came away disheartened. It was not by the taproom that he should get at the real heart of England's peasantry.

As, therefore, the men cared nothing for his society, would rather not have it, and were *gênés* with it as most of us should be had we to spend an evening alone with a duke, and all of us had we to converse with an archangel, Alan fell back upon his own resources, and when he was not devising new things for the improvement of the people, or, when he was not too tired physically for further exertion, he began again those visits at Dalmeny Hall which were almost a necessity of his daily life. That he preferred the garb of an English gentleman to that of an English labourer goes without saying: and also that it was a relief beyond the power of words to

escape from the narrow limits of his cottage, and find himself in Miranda's room, in the sunshine of her presence, away from the sordid and mean conditions with which he had surrounded himself.

At first, all their talk was of the great experiment and its chances of success, which were as yet uncertain. But when Miranda had other guests, and her own share of talk with Alan was small, he found himself taking interest, as of old, in mundane affairs of a general nature. It was hard to say whether he returned to his cottage with renewed vigour or with disgust. Certainly it looked meaner and more sordid every day: certain the details of his work appeared more disagreeable: but, on the other hand, he had the sympathy of Miranda, and after each talk with her, the approval of his soul was more largely bestowed upon the Work of his life as he called it (with a capital W), because she, too, thought it great, and worthy, and commendable.

And on Sundays he spent the whole

livelong day with Miranda, grudging the lapse of every hour.

In the afternoons, when the morning church, necessary for example's sake to every leader of bucolics, was finished, they would talk. There were the gardens of Dalmeny Hall set about with lawns and flower-beds and shady walks; there were the splendid elms and rolling turf of Weyland Park: there the banks of the silver Wey winding round meadows, lawns, and among great trees: or there was the great Hall of Weyland Court itself, or there was its library. Alan was a great talker to Miranda alone. To her he talked like Coleridge, in a full, rich torrent, though perhaps he was not so unintelligible. To the rest of the world he was a man of reserve, respected because he had the courage of his opinions, and a great cause of small talk by reason of his crotchets, hobbies, and flights. A man with the mysterious power which belongs to one who can hold his tongue. Great in the might of silence.

It was out of these talks that was evolved the Abbey of Thelema.

It began one afternoon in January, when for once the north wind slept, and a warm west wind, which did not carry rain with it, brought comfort to the buds which made all the underwood purple, and were already whispering to each other that the spring was coming. As they walked along the river-bank, Weyland Court rose at their right, on a low hill, in lawns sloping away on every side. They stood and looked at it.

"It is a beautiful place, Alan," said Miranda for the thousandth time. "What a pity that you cannot live in it still, and carry out your plans in your own place."

"Not yet, Miranda," he replied; "not yet for years; not till a new generation has grown up who can run alone in the path of culture."

"What can you do with it?" she asked. "It would be a shame to let it."

"I will never let it."

"And it seems a shame that no one lives in it."

The house was in red brick, and stood round a quadrangle open to the south, like one or two courts of the red brick colleges of Cambridge, say the second court of St. John's, or the ivy court of Jesus, or the single court, only that is faced with stone, of pretty Clare. It had a splendid great hall, which we have already seen; it had a chapel, a library, a long drawing-room, running over the whole ground-floor of one side: it had a garden within the quadrangle: its walls were covered with all kinds of creepers: it had a stately gateway of that ornamented iron-work in which the genius of English art seems most to have concentrated itself. On the west and south lay the great gardens: on the north the view stretched across the park over hundreds of acres of splendid land which, I suppose, ought to be turned into fields arable, but which was rich with wood and coppice and elastic turf. On the east side was planted a thick grove of pines to keep off the English mistral.

The place was erected for a convent, but

never fulfilled the purpose of the founder because, after his death—he had been a stupendous sinner, and thought to patch matters up by founding a nunnery—came the dissolution of all the religious orders, and the generous monarch who sent all monks and nuns out into the world, bestowed Weyland Priory, which became Weyland Court, upon the first Dunlop who had ever received the royal favour.

Then Miranda had an idea.

“Alan,” she said, “we have talked about all kinds of fraternities, societies, and communities, except one.”

“What is that, Miranda?”

“A society where ladies and gentlemen can live together without any aims, either religious, political, or social.”

“Is not that the ideal of modern society?”

“But an ideal never reached, Alan. Suppose we formed such a society and placed it at Weyland Court.”

“The Galois and the Galoises were such a society,” he replied, laughing.

“ They lived according to their own lights, which I suppose they thought advanced. But I fear we cannot imitate them. Then there was the Abbey of Thelema, which seems to meet your case.”

“ What was the Abbey of Thelema ?”

“ When we get home, I will read you all about it.”

“ Then let us go home at once, and you shall read it to us.”

They went home. Desdemona was staying with Miranda, her mother being more than usually ill. Alan went to the library, found the first volume of Urquhart's Rabelais, and read about the story of the celebrated Abbey, which, as everybody knows, breaks off short at the very beginning, and tells an expectant world nothing more than how the Abbey was started.

“ It is the way with all good things,” sighed Miranda. “ What I always want is to go beyond the story ; I want to find out how they got on with their Abbey. Did the Brothers and Sisters fall in love

with each other? Did they go on living together without quarrels and little jealousies?"

"My dear," said Desdemona the wise, "when the curtain drops, the lovers part, the weeping father dries his eyes, and we all go home to humdrum supper and bed. That is all to be got out of going beyond the story. Believe in the happy moment. The rest is below consideration."

"Ah!" Miranda replied. "But if it were only possible to have such an Abbey."

"Why not?" asked Alan.

"To collect together a band of men and women who would simply lead the pleasantest life attainable, and never forget that they are gentlemen and gentlewomen."

"Why not?" repeated Alan.

"My dear Alan," said Desdemona, "the fact of your extraordinary freedom from young men's follies, though you are yourself a mere boy, makes me hopeful that you mean something."

“I mean,” said Alan, “that if you and Miranda could get up such an Abbey, there is Weyland Court for you. First, because it will please Miranda; and secondly, because while I am trying my experiment in the village, Miranda may try hers with people of culture and see what will come of it.”

“But it will cost unheard-of sums,” urged Desdemona.

“Weyland Court can afford a good deal. It is only keeping open house for a time.”

“Alan!” Miranda clapped her hands. “If you really mean it—but, of course, you always mean what you say. Quick, Desdemona, dear; let us have pen and paper and begin our new Abbey. Only,” she hesitated for a moment, “people would say that it is quite too absurd.”

“People say what they please,” said Alan. “Wild words wander here and there. They say I am doing an absurd thing in working on my farm. That is gravely absurd. Suppose we do an absurd

thing which shall have no gravity about it at all, but only whimsical, and start our Abbey after the rules laid down by Father Rabelais."

"Yes, Alan, let us try it; we have been too grave lately."

"Then, on one condition, Miranda. It is that you become the Lady Abbess, and that Desdemona gives us her help in organising the thing."

"No—no," said Desdemona. "In your own house you must be Abbot, Prior, or whatever you call it."

But Alan was inflexible on this point. He promised to become an active-working Brother, so long as it did not interfere with his work in the village; he would attend regularly, dine sometimes, take a leading part in the ceremonies, but Miranda must be the chief.

So it was settled.

"And for the ceremonies," said Miranda, "Desdemona must direct."

"I will do what I can," said Desdemona. "Of course you will have mediæval things

revived. You ought to have games, riding at the ring, tournaments, mediæval singing and dancing, and mediæval dresses. All the Brothers and Sisters will be rich, I suppose."

"All but Tom Caledon," said Miranda; "and if we have Tom Caledon, we must have Nelly, and she is not rich at all. But that does not matter."

"Not at all," said Alan.

"Ah! You two," murmured Desdemona.

What a thing for two young people, not one, which always happens, and which is the reason why this world is so lopsided—What a thing, I say, that you can do what you like without thinking of money! If I could only persuade you to run a theatre on high principles, which would not pay."

"The Abbey first, dear Desdemona," said Miranda. "And when that is done with, if ever it is, we will have our theatre, and you shall be the manager."

But Desdemona shook her head.

"Women ought not to be managers," she said. "They make bad administra-

tors. There is only one man fit to be the dictator of a theatre. And that is—but I will tell you when we start the new house.”

Then they all three went over to Weyland Court and examined its capabilities.

“What do you think?” asked Alan.

“The hall,” said Desdemona, “will, of course, be the refectory, and the ball-room as well. Think of dining habitually in so splendid a hall. The lovely drawing-room, which is like that of Guy’s Cliff, only longer and more beautiful, will do for our ordinary evenings; I see several rooms which will do for breakfast and morning rooms. There are stables ready for fifty horses: the kitchen is fit for a City company——”

“And rooms,” Miranda interrupted, “for as many Brothers and Sisters as we can take in. Shall we have twenty-four, Desdemona? That seems a good round number to begin with.”

But Desdemona thought twenty would be better, and they resolved on twenty.

“Every Brother and Sister to have two rooms,” the girl went on, warming to her work, “and one room for his or her servant. That makes sixty rooms; and there are plenty to spare for guests, without counting the three haunted chambers.”

“Oh!” said Alan, “you will have guests?”

“Of course,” Desdemona answered. “What is the good of showing the world how to live if nobody comes to see you? You might just as well act to an empty house.”

“And who will you invite to join?” Alan asked.

Miranda threw herself into a chair, and took paper and pen.

“You, Alan, for one. What name will you take? But we will find you one. And you, Desdemona dear, under that name and no other. And I Miranda, because I shall not change my name. That makes three out of the twenty. Then we must ask Adela Fairfax, if only for her beautiful playing. And Edith Cambridge, because she is so

beautiful and so clever. And perhaps Major Vanbrugh will join us. And then there is Tom Caledon. Oh! what an Abbey we shall have !”

So the Abbey was started. And to the County it seemed a more desirable piece of madness than the farm. And nothing gave the world so much satisfaction as the name conferred upon Alan Dunlop. For, as Lucy Corrington told Lord Alwyne, as the Brethren never knew what he would do next, they called him Brother Hamlet.

“But what in the name of goodness,” asked Sister Desdemona, “are we to do with the Chapel ?”



CHAPTER XII.

“We may outrun
By violent swiftness that which we do run at,
And lose by overrunning.”

MEANTIME, the days crept slowly on with Alan. To rise at dawn, or before it; to go forth after a hasty breakfast prepared by his own hands, to receive his orders from the bailiff; to get through the day's work as well as he could, feeling all the time that he was the least efficient labourer of the whole twelve hands, or even, counting the boys, of the whole twenty-four, employed upon the farm, a useful but humiliating lesson for the young Oxford man who had been trained in the belief that whatever a gentleman put his hand to, he would immediately do better than anybody else;

to wear those confounded corduroys, turned up at the ankles; to meet one's friends in such a disguise that they seldom recognised him; to pass a cavalcade of ladies riding along the road, and to pull his cart—as a carter Alan was perhaps as good as any other man on the estate—out of their way into the ditch; to work on in a field, conscious that a dozen people were leaning over the gate, come forth on purpose to see the Squire attired as a labouring man, carrying out the teaching of the “*Fors Clavigera*,” to acquire an enormous appetite at the ungodly hour of eleven, and appease it, sitting in a hedge, with great hunks of cold bacon and bread—actually, cold bacon and bread—and other homely cates; to plod home at night to his dismal, damp cottage, there to light a fire and brew a solitary tea for himself; and after tea to fight against the physical fatigue, which seemed to numb all his faculties at once;—this was the life which Alan for the most part led. As regards his work, he found that he made but an indifferent labourer;

that his companions, who undoubtedly excelled him in practical bucolic art, scoffed at him almost before his face; and that, so far from becoming the friend and confidant of the men, he day by day seemed to be drifting farther from them. It was from no pride or exclusiveness on his part. He fed the pigs, drove the cows, groomed the horses, carted the manure, hedged and ditched, learned to manage the steam plough, taught himself the great Art and Mystery of Thatching, learned a little rough carpentering, tried to shoe a horse, but got kicked, and grubbed up the weeds as patiently as any old man in the village.

“The busy hours,” he said to Miranda, “are doubled by the solitude. The men, among themselves, talk and make merry after their fashion. What they talk about, or what their jokes between themselves are, Heaven only knows. When I come among them they are suddenly silent. Even the boys are afraid of me.”

“You will understand them,” said Miranda, “after a time.”

He shook his head.

“I begin to despair. And in the evening when I should be useful and ready to devise new schemes for their benefit, the weariness is so great, that I sit down in my chair, and, half the week, fall fast asleep.”

“And can you live on your wages, Alan?”

Here, I regret to say, he positively blushed, because here, he felt, was the great breakdown of his plan.

“No, Miranda, with all my economy, I spend exactly double what I earn. I cannot understand it. I began with drinking nothing but water and coffee. Yet one gets so confoundedly hungry. How *do* they manage it?”

Not only did he begin with coffee and water, but he began by knocking off tobacco. He would no longer smoke.

“And yet,” he said to Miranda, “it made no difference to the people whether I smoked or whether I did not. They don’t seem to care what I do. As for beer, they drink as much as they can get; and as

for tobacco, they smoke as much as they can."

"Although," said Desdemona, "you have sacrificed your interest in Havanna, they retain theirs in Virginia. Why not?"

"So I have taken to tobacco again, and I confess I like it."

"And the total abstinence plan—how does that work?" asked Desdemona.

"I have had to give it up. What is the use of letting the people know that you have given up wine when they cleave to their beer?"

"Exactly," said Desdemona, who could never be taught to sympathise with the grand experiment. "You gave up your allegiance to the grape of Bordeaux, and you fancied they would give up theirs to the barley of the Spotted Lion. Poor enthusiast!"

"Well, I have taken to my claret again, now. And, of course, it is absurd to pretend any longer to live within my wages."

"You have been brought up," said Desdemona the sceptic, "to live as all

English gentlemen do ; that is, well. You tried suddenly, and without preparation, to live as no English gentlemen do ; that is, in a minimum. What could you expect but a breakdown ?”

“ Yes,” he said sadly. “ It is a breakdown, so far.”

“ As your daily diet is different from theirs,” the woman of experience went on, “ so are your thoughts different from their thoughts. Your brain is quickened by education, by generous diet, by freedom from care ; theirs are dulled by no education, by low living, and by constant money anxieties. You have travelled and read ; they know nothing but what they see. My poor Alan, what sort of minds do you propose to understand with all this trouble ?”

“ There is a sense in all men,” said Alan, “ which lies dormant in some, but must be a lingering spark that wants the breath of sympathy to kindle it into flame. It is the spur of all noble actions. I want to light that flame in all their hearts.”

“ In your rank,” said the actress, “ they

call it ambition, and it is laudable ; in theirs, it is discontent, and it is a crime. Would you fly straight in the face of your Church Catechism ?”

As the days went on, the physical weariness grew less, Alan became stronger ; the pains went out of his legs and arms ; he could stoop over a field and go weeding for hours without suffering ; he acquired, as we have said, an enormous appetite, and, probably because he lived better than the rest of the men, he found himself after a time able to sit up in the evening, work, write, and devise things for the good of the village.

First, he began to look into the doings of the Parliament, which had now held a weekly Saturday evening sitting for some six weeks. He discovered, on inquiry, that his orders about providing a good supper, with abundance of beer, had been literally and liberally carried out, but that, as no minutes of proceedings were kept, it was impossible for him to discover what, if anything, had been discoursed. What really

happened, as he soon found out, was, that the men, after eating the supper and drinking the beer, adjourned without any further debate to the Spotted Lion.

This discovery struck Alan with consternation. He took blame to himself for the carelessness with which he had left the Parliament to its own duties. He ought, he remembered, to have attended at every meeting, to have presided, suggested topics of discussion, and led. But he had always been so tired. One thing, however, was clear. It was not enough to point the way. The rustics required a leader. That he ought to have known all along.

Accordingly on the next Saturday evening, the members of the House of Commons received an intimation by means of a fly-leaf, that supper would no longer be provided, as it appeared to be a hindrance to deliberation.

“You may,” Alan wrote, “when you divide your profits from the farm, vote whatever proportion you please to be spent weekly supper. Indeed, some suc

sort of common festal meal, to which the women and children could be admitted, seems most desirable and helpful. But I cannot longer encourage a feast which I designed as a preliminary to serious talk, and which seems to have been converted into a drinking-bout."

"What does the Squire mean by this here, William?" asked the oldest inhabitant.

But William could not explain this unexpected move. It was beyond him. A weekly supper which had lasted for six weeks seemed destined to last for ever. When the men recovered sufficiently to discuss the matter, it was considered as an act of meanness beyond any precedent.

On the following Saturday, Alan came to the Parliament, bringing with him a bundle of papers for discussion. At the hour of assembling there was no one there at all. Presently the cobbler of the village dropped in casually. After him, pretending not to be his friend, came in a stranger, who practised the art of cobbling in the

cathedral town of Athelston, near Weyland. And then the schoolmaster looked in. The cobbler of Athelston, after a decent pause, rose energetically, and asked Alan if this was a place for freedom of speech.

“Certainly, my friend,” said the young reformer. “We are met together to discuss all points.”

“Then,” quoth the cobbler, “I am prepared to prove that there is no God.”

Alan assured him that political and social problems, not theological, were the object of the Village Parliament. But he would not be convinced, and after a few withering sarcasms directed against autocrats, aristocrats, and priests, he retired, followed by his friend, the village cobbler, who secretly nourished similar persuasions. There is something in the smell of leather which is fatal to religion.

There was then only the schoolmaster left. He was a moody, discontented man, who chafed at being under the rule of the vicar, and longed for the superior freedom of a school board. Being by right of his profes-

sion a superior person, he cherished the companion vices of contempt and envy. These naturally go with superiority ; and he came to the Parliament like some of those who go to church, namely, with the intention of scoffing. His intention was gratified because, as no one came at all, he had the satisfaction of going home and scoffing in his lodgings at the Squire. Alas ! a secret scoff within four walls brings no real satisfaction with it. You *must* have two to bring out the full flavour of a scoff. Fancy Mephistopheles enjoying a solitary sneer ! That is one reason why hermits are such exceedingly jolly dogs, ever ready for mirth, and credulous to a fault.

“ It is no use,” said Alan to the schoolmaster, “ not the slightest use bringing forward a measure for discussion when there is no one present but you and me. Let us adjourn the house.”

As they passed the Spotted Lion together they heard the voices of the rustics in high debate. The taproom was their true House of Parliament.

There was once a good and faithful missionary who, after weeks of unrewarded labour, succeeded one evening in persuading three native boys to mount with him into an upper chamber, there to make inquiry. He naturally began with fervent prayer, and being carried away by fervour, continued this exercise aloud, with eyes closed, for the space of forty-five minutes or thereabouts. On opening his eyes, this poor labourer found that the three inquirers had stealthily crept away during his uplifting, and were gone.

Alan felt as sad as my friend the missionary. People who will not be led, and to whom it is useless to point the way, must be gently pushed or shoved in the right direction—a truth which Baxter perceived many years ago, and which is illustrated by a well-known tract. Therefore, as self-reform was not to be hoped for, he began to reform the village for them.

First he opened a shop in the village on the most enlightened co-operative principle. It was that by which the purchasers divide

the profits in proportion to their purchases. Alan first proposed to the village shopkeeper that she should exchange her shop for the post of manager under the new system. But she was a person of defective imagination, and could not be persuaded to see the advantages of the offer. Alan then issued a tract, in which he explained exactly and clearly the method to be followed. Every purchase, with the name of the purchaser, was to be entered in a book, and at the close of the year, when the books were made up, the profits were to be divided equitably according to the amount of the purchases. The shop was to be a sort of universal provider. Alan entrusted the management to a young man who promised to give it his undivided care for fifteen shillings a week, rent, fire, and candles. The young man was not pleasant to look upon, but he was highly recommended by his uncle, who had a grocery establishment in Athelston. He was a Particular Baptist by conviction, and ready to preach if invited. He was only eighteen,

and had sandy hair, which, of course, was not his fault.

“We must succeed, Miranda,” cried Alan, in a sort of rapture, standing in the newly-opened shop. “We sell everything at ten per cent. over cost price. We sell everything of the best, there will be no adulteration, of course; we give no credit, and consequently have no bad debts. And in our tract we appeal to almost the lowest of all human motives: the desire for gain. It is a system which only has to be stated and understood in order to be adopted at once. Not only will our customers see that they get their tea and other things cheaper, but better, and in the long-run that they share in the advantages of honest trade. Good tea,”—here he clasped the canister to his heart,—“good sugar, good rice, good cheese, good flannel—everything good. Why, the village-shop will regenerate the village. And, Miranda, the first step is taken when I have made them discontented with their present condition.”

Alan laid in for himself as much tea and groceries as would suffice for ten cottages. Then, in his ardour, he ordered his house-keeper at the Court to use the village-shop; persuaded Miranda to drive into the village and order quantities of things which she did not want, all of which were paid for on the spot, and got the Vicarage people to patronise it, so that the shop began with a fair stroke of business. One thing only went to mar the general cheerfulness : none of the villagers went into the shop at all, unless when Alan invited them, and, after explaining at length the principles of co-operation, bought articles of domestic consumption for them, and paid for them on the spot. Then they went away, bearing their pounds of tea, and came no more. The reason was, not only the habit of going day after day in the same way, in the fetters of use and wont, but also a more important reason, that they all had " ticks " at the old village-shop which they could not pay off. Alan's only plan would have been to have shut up the ancient establish-

ment, pay all the debts of the village, and start fair. Even then, there would be some of the more dashing spirits who would spend their wages at the Lion, and ask for credit on the very next Saturday.

There was a third hindrance to the success of the shop: one which was as yet unsuspected by its promoters. It was, that the manager, the sandy-haired young man of the name of Hutchings, was contracting the habit of sitting secretly and by night over the ledgers, not with the lawful desire of estimating profit and loss, but with the reprehensible design of cooking the accounts. As nobody interfered with him, and he gave no receipts, this was not difficult; and as immunity encourages the sinner, he soon prepared two ledgers, in one of which he entered faithfully before the eyes of the purchaser any item, and in the other he divided the purchases by half, or even left them out altogether; and he put the money into his pocket, and went off to the city of Athelston every Saturday evening.

“ I hope, George,” said his uncle, meeting him, “ I do hope that you have had a warning, and are now going straight.”

“ Ah! yah! there you go,” replied his nephew, “ always throwing a thing into a poor fellow’s face. Why don’t you go off and tell the Connection? Why don’t you take and write to Squire Dunlop? Ah! why don’t you?”

“ If you’d been my son,” said the man of virtue, “ I’d have behaved to you as a parent should—cut your liver out first, and turned you out of the house next.”

Which shows what a useful thing is a testimonial, and how, like charity, it may be made to cover a multitude of sins.

Exhilarated by the dream of his shop, Alan prepared the way, by another tract, for his next great move; this was nothing less than a direct blow at the Licensed Victuallers’ interests.

“ I propose to establish,” he said, in the introductory tract which he sent about the village—these were now so numerous that they ceased to interest the village mind

at all, any more than the Sunday sermon—
“I propose to establish a bar at which only plain and unadulterated beer, sent to the house by the best brewers, shall be sold, with the addition of a very small percentage for management and carriage. The price shall be exactly that which can repay the producer. It will, therefore, cost about half of what you now pay, and will, of course, be infinitely better in quality. Three-fourths of the crime of this country is due, not only to excessive drinking, but to the drinking of bad liquor; and the same proportion of disease is due to the same shameful cause. My shop will be called the ‘Good Liquor Bar.’ The beer will be drunk on the spot, or carried away to be consumed among your own families, or while you are following your favourite studies. It will be paid for when ordered. The bar will be under the same roof as the shop.”

Mr. Hutchings, fortunately, had a young friend in Athelston who, although a sincere Christian and a fellow-member of the

Connection, was experienced in the liquor traffic. By his recommendation the young friend was appointed on probation. He was not nice to look at any more than his companion, but good looks go for nothing. The two young men lived together, and when the shop and bar were shut, it was pretty to see them innocently making up their double ledgers. On Saturday evenings they put money in their pockets and went off to Athelston together.

“You see, Miranda,” Alan explained, when he was offering her a glass of pure beer in the Good Liquor Bar itself, “you see that if we offer them a room with table and chairs, we only perpetuate the waste of time which goes on at the public-house over the way. As they will not do without beer altogether, which we could wish, perhaps they will learn to use the bar as a house of call, not as a village club. We must wait, however, I suppose, until we have got our reading-room before we shall succeed in getting them to spend the even-

ings rationally. Already, I think, there are symptoms of a revival; do you not, Miranda? I saw one of them reading my last tract this morning."

"It is the young man they call Will—i—am," said Miranda; "I saw him too. It was he who ordered in the cask of beer at the first Parliament. No doubt he is thinking how to get some advantage to himself out of the new bar."

"William has not, to be sure, enlarged views," said Alan. "In the lower levels the instinct of self-preservation assumes offensively prominent forms."

"You are looking fagged, Alan," she said in her kindly sympathetic way; "are you taxing your strength too much?"

"We had some heavy work this morning. Nothing more. I am a little disheartened sometimes, that is all. Any little thing like the sight of our friend with the tract gives me a little encouragement. And then one gets despondent again."

Already he was beginning to feel that culture was not to be suddenly and swiftly

made admirable in the eyes of Old England's peasantry.

The Work was, however, as yet far from complete. Alan's designs embraced a great deal more than a Co-operative Shop and a Good Liquor Bar. His next step was to build a Bath House with a Public Laundry attached. There were hot and cold baths, a swimming-bath for men and another for women. This was an expensive business, and one which he never expected to pay the preliminary outlay. But it was part of his scheme, and in a really eloquent tract he explained that those who regard bathing as a luxury for the rich forget that it is one of the accompaniments of godly living. The institution was to be on the same co-operative principles as the shop and the bar, the profits being divided among the bathers and the washerwomen. He began by setting an example of an early morning tub to the whole parish. No one followed him. He might as well, indeed, have invited the villagers to sit up to the neck in a clear fire for half an hour as ask them to take a

cold bath. Bathing, however, he recognised to be a thing which requires gradual training.

“The history of bathing,” he said to Miranda, “is a curious chapter in that of civilisation. I do not think either Lecky or Buckle has treated it. Once, indeed, Dr. Playfair made the egregious blunder of stating in the House that for a thousand years nobody ever washed himself. Nothing could be more untrue; what really happened was that the public bath of the whole Roman people became a private luxury reserved for the rich among the Westerns. In England and France the nobles never ceased to enjoy the luxury of a bath, and there are plenty of evidences to show that the poor took it when they could get it. But in England the custom fell out, and it is true that for something like a thousand years poor people have ceased to wash themselves. Heaven only knows what ideas may not come in with the return to personal cleanliness.”

When the Bath-rooms were completed,

or even before, he began to convert what had been a Dissenting Chapel into a Free Library and Reading Room. This did not cost much. He fitted bookshelves round the walls, filled them with a selection of a couple of thousand volumes, which he partly chose from the Weyland Court Library, and partly bought from catalogues, put in a few chairs and a couple of tables, laid out pens and paper, gave orders for certain papers and magazines, and installed a Librarian.

The Librarian was a pale-faced pupil-teacher, a girl whose delicate constitution would have broken down under the pressure of rough school-work, and to whom the post of custodian of the Library and Reading Room, at a salary of sixty pounds a year, was a little heaven. She was the first convert whom Alan Dunlop made in the village. Like another Cadijah, she was an enthusiast. Mr. Dunlop was her prophet: she read all his tracts and kept supplies of them for her friends; she absorbed all his theories, and wanted to carry them right through to their logical conclusion; she

preached his doctrines in season and out of season. To her Mr. Dunlop was the greatest thinker, the noblest of men, the wisest of mankind. Needless to add that a tract appeared as soon as the Library and Reading Room opened, pointing out the advantages to be derived from serious study and the enormous superiority of the Reading Room as a place of comfort over the Spotted Lion.

“And now,” said Miranda, when she came with Desdemona to admire the Library, “now, Alan, that you have done everything that you can for the villagers, I suppose you will give up living among them and come back again to your own place?”

“Everything, Miranda? I have as yet done next to nothing; if I were to withdraw myself the whole fabric which I have begun to build up with so much care would at once fall to pieces. Besides, I have only just begun, and there is nothing really completed at all.”

“Well, Alan, go on; I can sympathise

with you, if I can do nothing else," said Miranda gently.

They were in the Library, which had been open a week. It was in the evening, a fine evening in early January, when the frost was out on the flooded meadows. No one was in the Library but themselves, Desdemona, and the young Librarian, who was gazing with large rapt eyes at her prophet.

"Go on, Alan. There are only Prudence Driver and ourselves to hear you. Prudence will not gossip in the village. Tell us what you think of doing next."

"I have not decided quite on the next step. There are so many things to do. Among other plans I am going to organise for the next winter—not for this—a series of weekly lectures on such scientific subjects as can be made popular. Astronomy, for instance, practical chemistry, and so on—things that can be made interesting by means of oxy-hydrogen slides, diagrams, and experiments. Some of the lectures I shall give myself. Some I shall have to pay for."

“ These will not come out of the profits of the farm, I suppose ?” said Desdemona, who really was a Didymus for want of faith.

“ No, it would not be fair ; the lectures will be for the whole village, and will be my own gift to them. Of course they will be free. If only I could get the men out of that wretched habit of abstracting their thoughts the moment one begins to talk. Then I shall have a night-school ; a shed where we can drill the younger men and boys——”

“ And, oh ! something for girls, Mr. Dunlop,” pleaded the young Librarian. “ Everything is done for the boys, and the girls are left to grow up as useless and as frivolous as—as—as their sisters.”

“ You shall take the girls under your charge, Prudence,” said Alan kindly, “ and I will do for them whatever you think best. Consider the thing carefully, and propose something for the girls.”

“ Next,” he went on, “ I mean to have a Picture and Art Gallery.”

“A picture gallery? For rustics, Alan?” Miranda was amazed, and even Prudence, prepared for any length, gasped. Desdemona sat down and fanned herself, though it was a cold night.

“A Picture and Art Gallery,” he repeated. “Why should Art belong only to wealthy people? Are we not to suppose a love of beautiful things—a feeling for form and colour—to exist in the minds of our poor? Tell me, Prudence, child, what you think?”

She shook her head.

“My father is one of them,” she said, “and my brothers and sisters. I think there is no such love of Art as the books tell us of among them.”

She had the Library all to herself and browsed in it at her will, so that she could speak of books with authority.

“It is only latent,” said Alan. “The contemplation of beautiful things will awaken the dormant sense. My pictures will be only copies, Miranda, and my collection of other things will be a loan

collection, for which I shall put all my friends under contribution. Prudence is going to be the first Curator of the Gallery."

The girl's eyes sparkled. This was too much happiness.

"And then, Miranda," Alan went on, "I am going to have festivals and dances for the people. They are stupid because they get no amusements; they have no amusements because those who have taken charge of them, the clergy, have fostered an idiotic notion that amusements such as people like—those which stir the pulses and light up the eyes and fill the brain with excitement—are wicked. It is wicked, the people have been taught, to dance. It is wicked to dress up and act; it is wicked to go to theatres, though, to be sure, our poor folk have got small chances of seeing a play. Now I am going to start in my village a monthly ball for Saturday night, at which the dances will be the same as you have at your own balls—the young people will soon learn them, I believe; I

am going to build a small theatre and run a country company for a month in the year, without thinking whether it will pay; I am going to encourage them to try acting for themselves as an amusement; I shall train a band of village musicians, and establish a madrigal club; I shall hold festivals, to which the people can invite their friends from other villages, and which shall be directed by themselves as soon as they have learned the art of self-government; and I am going to organise expeditions to distant places, to London, for instance, in order to teach the people how wide the world is, and how men and women live in different fashion."

"That sounds very beautiful, Alan," said Miranda, "if it is feasible. But do you think it is?"

"I hope so—I think so. At least, we can try it."

"And how long will your experiment take?"

"All my life, Miranda," he answered, meeting her look, which had an expression

almost of pleading with an inspired gaze of enthusiasm.

She left him and drove home, sorrowful. All his life ! To live all the years of his life in that little cottage ; to work every day at rough and thankless farm-work ; to toil every evening for the slow and sluggish folk. Surely even the "Fors Clavigera" did not exhort to such self-sacrifice.

Always, every Sunday, as the weeks went on, Miranda thought Alan more melancholy over his experiment. And there was always the same burden of lament.

"I cannot enter into their minds, Miranda."

No talk of giving up the work ; no leaving the plough and turning back ; only confession of failure or of weakness.

"If I could only understand their minds !"

The autumn deepened into winter ; winter passed away, and spring, and

summer found Alan Dunlop still plodding among the furrows all the day, and working for the rustics all the evening. But he grew worn and downcast, finding no fruit of all his toil.



CHAPTER XIII.

“ But none were *gênés* : the great hour of union
Was rung by dinner’s knell : till then all were
Masters of their own time—or in communion
Or solitary as they chose to bear
The hours.”

A MONASTERY which has no fixed rules may yet have certain practices. Among these was one that no Brother or Sister should be called in the morning, unless by special arrangement. The father of this custom was a philosophical Brother who held that the time to go to bed is when you can no longer keep your eyes open, and the time to get up when hunger compels you. Naturally, this Brother was always last at breakfast.

It is not easy, with every desire for

innovation, to improve very much on the national custom of breakfast. Some took a cup of coffee at eight and breakfasted at eleven in French fashion. One or two, including Desdemona, breakfasted in their own rooms. No one, said Desdemona, ought to be expected to be in good spirits, to say clever things, or to be amusing in the morning. She added that her experience of life taught her that good temper is not a thing so abundant as to be lavishly squandered over foolish extravagancies early in the day, but to be carefully guarded and even hoarded for the evening, when it is wanted to crown and complete the day. For this reason she kept her own room. For the rest separate tea and coffee sets were provided for every one, and they came down at any time, between eight and one or two, which seemed good.

On the morning after her reception, Nelly appeared at half-past eleven, a little ashamed of herself for lateness. Tom was in the breakfast-room, waiting for her. Miranda had long since gone to Dalmeny

Hall. There was a melodious tinkling of music in the corridor as she passed the Sisters' rooms. There was a rehearsal of a new two-act piece going on in the theatre; and there was all the bustle and sound of a big house in full swing for the rest of the day. Only her fellow-novice, Brother Peregrine, was still at breakfast. Nelly took a chair beside him, and Tom began to run about getting her things.

"Sister Rosalind is not fatigued, I hope?" asked Brother Peregrine with more anxiety than Tom thought altogether called for.

"Thank you; not at all," replied the girl, attacking breakfast with the vigour of twenty; "I never am tired after a ball. What makes me tired is sitting at home with mamma."

"Still, that must be delightful for her," said Mr. Exton.

"Not delightful at all, I assure you. We only quarrel. Don't we, Tom, especially when there is some one to quarrel about?"

Tom laughed and declined to compro-

mise himself by any statements on Mrs. Despard's domestic manners and customs. Mr. Exton began to draw conclusions.

"I am very late, Tom," she went on, "Give me some tea, please. We might have had a ride before breakfast. Why did you not send somebody up to call me?"

"We will ride after breakfast instead."

"And now, tell me, what do we do all day in the Abbey? And how do you amuse the Sisters?"

"We all do exactly what we please," said Tom — "the Sisters paint, play music, practise theatricals, consult about dress, ride, walk,—and, in fact, they are perfectly free to act as they think best."

"Of course," said Nelly, "else I should not have come here. That was the reward you held out if I would come. There are no duties, I suppose; no chapel six times a day, for instance."

"Absolutely none. There are not even calls to be made. The Sisters have decided that they are not bound to return visits while in the Abbey."

“ Now, that is really delightful. All my life long I have been yearning to escape from the round of duties. They were bad enough at school, and most intolerably stupid, but sometimes now I think they seem even far worse. Have you duty letters to write constantly, Mr. Exton ?”

“ Pardon me, Sister Rosalind—Brother Peregrine. I have no duty letters now that I have left India.”

“ Brother Peregrine, then—do you have to drive round in a one-horse brougham leaving cards ? Do you have to remember how long since you have written to people you care nothing about ? Those are my duties. And very, very hard work it is. But now that I am here, Tom, I expect to be amused. What will you do for me ?”

“ I will ride with you, dance with you, act with you, talk to you, walk with you, and fetch and carry for you.”

“ That is very good, and just what I expected,” she replied. “ And what will you do for me, Mr. Exton ?”

“Pardon me, Sister Rosalind—Brother Peregrine,” he corrected again, gravely.

“Brother Peregrine, then—what will your Brotherhood do?”

“I can do some of the things which Brother Lancelot proposes. Perhaps I can do a few which he has not proposed.”

“What are they? I am very easily amused, so long as I am kept in a good temper; am I not, Tom?”

Tom laughed.

“Can you be frivolous?” she asked. “Can you be mischievous? Can you make me laugh? Tom breaks down just at that point. He can’t make me laugh. Can you—can you, Brother Peregrine, become, to please me, Peregrine Pickle?”

The face with the myriad crows’ feet grew profoundly grave.

“To be frivolous,” said its owner, “without being silly has been my aim and constant object in life. I studied the art in the North-western Provinces, where there was nothing to distract one. What shall I do? I can juggle for you. I can tame

serpents ; I can make apple-trees grow in the ground before your eyes ; I can swallow swords ; I can make little birds come out of the palm of my hand—”

“You shall have an evening at the theatre,” said Tom, “and show off all your conjuring tricks.”

“I can sing to you, after a fashion ; make songs for you, after a fashion ; play the guitar too, still after my fashion. I could even do acrobatic tricks and walk on my hands, or stand on my head if that would please you.”

“It would, indeed !” Nelly cried with enthusiasm. “I have never seen a grown man walking on his hands. It would please me very much.”

“Well,” interposed the young man she called Tom, “you are not going to be entirely dependent on us two for your amusements. Let us look at the day’s engagements.”

He took a card from a silver stand on the breakfast-table. It was like the *menu* of a big dinner, being printed in gold letters

on coloured card with edging and border-work of very dainty illumination.

“This is the list of the day’s engagements,” Tom went on. “Of course no one is engaged, really, because here we all do what we please. But there seemed no other word that quite met the case. Desdemona draws it up for us every day. Sometimes it remains the same for several days together. Sometimes it varies. I will read it to you while you finish breakfast.

“‘THE ABBEY OF THELEMA,

“‘*Engagements of Tuesday, July 9, 1877.*

“‘11 A.M.—Brother Bayard will deliver a lecture in the hall on the Eastern Question, and the duty of England at the present Juncture. Admission by the western door for the Order.’”

“At eleven?” asked Nelly. “But it is half-past now. And besides,”—she pulled a long face—“one hardly went through the trouble of being received and everything in order to have the privilege of hearing

lectures. Is it, after all, only like the Crystal Palace? 11—Lecture. 12—the Blue Horse. 1.30—the Band. 2.30—the Burlesque. Tom, I am disappointed. After all, it is useless to expect anything from life but what one has already got.”

“When you have quite finished,” said Tom gravely, “you will let me remind you that you have not yet mastered the first rudiments of the Order. ‘*Fay ce que voudras.*’ If you feel any yearning to give a lecture, go and give one; if you want to hear anybody else’s lecture, go and attend. I suppose that Brother Bayard has been reading all sorts of pamphlets and papers on the Eastern Question, and has got his head full. It is much better that he should work off the thing in a lecture, than that he should keep simmering over it, writing a book about it, or troubling the peace of the Abbey with it.”

“Then we need not go to the lecture?”

“Certainly not. If you like we will look in presently and see how large an audience he has got together. And if you really

take an interest in the subject, you will very likely find it published next Saturday in the *Abbey Gazette*."

"Have you a newspaper here, then?"

"There are three. The *Gazette* is the official organ, which generally comes out, unless the editor forgets, on Saturday morning. In the *Gazette* everything is published which the members of the Order like to send—verses, love stories, articles, anything."

"How delightful! May I send something?" Visions of glory floated for a moment before Nelly's eyes. Yes, she, too, would be a poet, and write verses for the *Thelema Gazette*.

"I ought to mention one drawback," Tom went on; "I believe nobody ever reads the *Gazette*. But, if you send anything and tell me of it, I'll make a point of reading it."

"Thank you," said Nelly. "An audience of one doesn't seem much, does it? I think it must be hardly worth while writing verses for one person."

Brother Peregrine here remarked that

in his opinion that was the chief charm of verse-writing.

“Then there are two other papers,” Tom continued, “edited and written by two members of the Order, known to ourselves as Brother Benedick and Sister Audery. They run their novels through the papers, I believe, and Rondelet, whom we call Parolles, because he is all words, contributes leading articles to inculcate the doctrines of the Higher Culture. Nobody reads either of these papers. I forgot to say that you will find their editors in private life most delightful people. In public they squabble.”

“Who is Mr. Rondelet?”

“He is a Fellow of Lothian, Oxford.” Tom looked as if he did not care to communicate any more about Rondelet. “Let us go on with our engagements for the day.”

“‘At 12.30—Organ Recital, by Sister Cecilia.’”

“It is exactly like the Crystal Palace,” cried Nelly.

“Only without the people. Fancy

having the Palace all to yourself and your own friends ; fancy acting, singing, dancing, just as you liked, without the mob."

"If I acted," said Nelly, only half convinced, "I should like somebody to be looking at me."

Tom did not contest the point, but went on :—

"'At 2.30 P.M.—Polo in the Park, if the Brothers like to play.'"

"I shall go, for one," said Tom, with brightened eyes.

"So shall I," said the Brother they called Peregrine.

"We will play on opposite sides," said Tom, jealous already of the newly-elected Brother.

Mr. Roger Exton nodded, and went on with the cold beef.

"'At 5 P.M.—The Abbess will receive in the Garden.'"

"I forgot to tell you, Nell, that the Sisters have their own afternoons. There is no necessity to hamper ourselves with the divisions of the week, and as there are

now ten of you, we shall have to give you the tenth day. The days are announced in the morning list of engagements. Of course nobody is obliged to go. Mostly we go into the garden at five when it is fine, and find some one there with a table and a teapot."

"When I have my afternoon, Tom, will you be sure to come?"

"Of course I will." Then their eyes met and dropped with a light smile, as if they had memories common to both and perhaps pleasant.

"May I come, too, Sister Rosalind?" asked the man of a thousand crows' feet, noticing the look and smile while he drank his tea.

"Certainly, Mr. Exton."

"Brother Peregrine—I beg pardon, Sister Rosalind," he corrected gravely for the third time.

"'At 6 P.M.—Carriages will be ready for those who want to drive. Brothers who want a dog-cart must give early notice at the stables.'"

“Carriages?” Nelly asked with a laugh. “Have you any number of carriages?”

“I think there are a good many. Alan has half a dozen of various kinds that belong to the place, Miranda has sent over hers, and a good many of the Fraternity have sent down horses and traps of all sorts. So that we can turn out very respectably.”

“I think, Tom,” said Nelly, “that if you would go to the stables and say that you want a dog-cart for six o’clock, you might drive me about and show me the country.”

“May I sit behind?” asked the crow-footed one gently and humbly.

Tom scowled on him.

“Certainly you may,” said Nelly, “if you like sitting behind.”

“I do like sitting behind—sometimes,” he replied.

Then Tom went on with the list.

“‘At 7.30 P.M.—Dinner. Choral night.’ That means,” he explained, “that the band will play and the boys will sing. Do

you like hearing music and singing during dinner?"

"I never tried it," the girl replied. "If it was not noisy music I might like it. One ought to think of one's neighbours at dinner; that is the most important rule."

Mr. Exton said that self-preservation was the first law of life, and that he always thought of eating as the first characteristic of dinner.

"At 9.30—Performance of an entirely new and original comedietta in two acts in the Theatre of the Abbey. Stage manager, Sister Desdemona."

"Ah!" sighed Nelly; "that all seems very delightful. And what do we do after dinner, Tom?"

"Isn't that enough, child? After that we shall probably meet in the drawing-room. This is like all other drawing-rooms. Somebody sings; somebody plays; if a waltz is played, perhaps two or three couples may go round the room as if they were waltzing. I can go no farther, Nelly; your imagination must supply the rest."

“And do you always live like this?”
She heaved a deep sigh of content. “Always?”

“Yes, while we are in the Abbey.”

“And is no one ever cross?”

“Never, unless in their own rooms.”

“Does nobody’s mamma ever come down and order some unfortunate Sister back again to home and duty?”

“No; that has never happened yet.”

“Do you have guests?”

“Yes; but they are not allowed to get cross either. Everybody in this Abbey is always in the best possible of tempers. It is impossible to be anything but pleasant in this fortress of happiness.”

“Did you—ever—ask—mamma, for instance,”—Nelly put this question slowly, as if it was a poser,—“to join the Abbey for a few days?”

“I do not think we have,” replied Tom, with a light in his eyes; “I cannot ask her for my own part, you know.”

“Well, Tom, until you have asked her, I decline to believe that your Château

Gaillard is impregnable. However, if your tempers are always perfect, your days are surely sometimes a little dull. Now, without falling into temper, which is, after all, an ill-bred thing to do, it is quite possible for young persons of my sex to get together and say unkind things about each other. Do the Sisters—oh, Tom, tell me this—do they never show a little—just a little—envy, and hatred, and uncharitableness about some one's dress—or—perhaps—certain attentions paid to some one?"

"I really think, never."

"Then," said Nelly, rising from the table and putting her little foot down firmly, "this is a heaven beyond which I never care to go."

"In the North-west Provinces——" began Brother Peregrine.

"Does that anecdote," interrupted Nelly, "bear upon the Abbey, or upon juggling, or upon walking on your hands?"

"On the last," he replied, with a certain sadness.

"Then it will wait, I think. Come,

Tom, it is getting late. Let us go and see the lecturer."

"I forgot to say," said Tom, as they walked along the corridor which led to the hall, "that some of the Sisters have mornings. Would you like to receive in the morning?"

"It sounds pleasant. What do you do at a morning reception?"

"Nothing. You receive. Any one may call on you in your own cell. They call them cells, but really all are beautiful boudoirs; and some, Desdemona's for instance, are large rooms."

"But perhaps only one would call."

"Well, Nelly?"

"But, then, it would give rise, perhaps, to wicked tongues."

"There are no wicked tongues in this place. We all live as we like; we never think evil, or speak evil, of each other. 'A perfect trust,' Miranda says, 'is the true groundwork for the highest possible form of society.' Give up your worldly ideas and be a true Sister of the Order, and,

like your namesake in 'As You Like It,' 'forget the condition of your estate, and devise sports.' Let us be happy together while we can, Nelly."

"Yes, Tom," she replied prettily and humbly, while his hand sought hers for a moment.

"What morning will you have?" Tom asked. "Let me see—Sunday——"

"Oh! Tom, you heathen—church on Sunday."

"Monday — Tuesday — Wednesday ; I think no one has a Wednesday, and you can receive between twelve and two."

"Yes, I see ; all comers. Perhaps only one comer ; what an opening ! And just suppose, Tom, only suppose for a moment that you were that one comer, and that all of a sudden mamma were to arrive, and catch me receiving you all by myself. Oh——h !"

"I don't know, I really do not know, what she could say worse than what she said at Ryde. However, here is the hall-door. Hush ! we must not disturb the lecturer."

There were no signs of a crowded audience, quite the contrary; everything was still and deserted, but they heard the voice of the orator within. Tom pulled a curtain aside and they looked in. The hall was quite empty. Nobody was there at all, except the lecturer. He was provided with a platform, on which were the usual table, *carafe* of water, and glass, with a desk for his manuscript. In front of the platform rows of empty seats. The lecturer, who was just finishing, and had indeed arrived at his peroration, was leaning forward over the table on the points of his fingers, while in earnest tones, which echoed and rang along the old hall, he spoke.

“Yes, my friends,” he was saying, “all these things point in one direction, and only one. This I have indicated. Standing, as I do, before an audience of thoughtful men and women, deeply penetrated as I am with the responsibility of words uttered in this place, I cannot but reiterate, in the strongest terms, the convictions I have

already stated. Shall then, I ask, shall England tamely submit——”

Tom dropped the curtain.

“Come,” he whispered, “we have heard enough. Let us go back. That is the way we inflict our opinions on each other. I lectured the other day myself.”

“Did you, Tom? What on?”

“On the Inconveniences of a Small Income. Nobody came, indeed I did not expect anybody, and I spoke out like Cicero.”

“Indeed,” said Nelly; “I have always thought, when men will talk politics at dinner, how very pleasant it would be for each man to have said all he had to say by himself for a quarter of an hour before dinner. Then we might have rational conversation.”

“*Your* rational conversation, Nell. I like it though. The prettiest prattle in the world to me.”

She looked in his face and laughed.

“Let me go and put on my habit. That sort of speech is dangerous, Tom.”

When she returned, she found the horses waiting, and Brother Peregrine mounted too, ready to go with them.

“I found your horses walking about,” he said. “May I join your ride?”

Of course he might, Nelly said. Tom thought it the most confounded impertinence, and rode off in stately sulkiness.

“Now,” he said to himself, “she is going to flirt with the fellow, because he has got ten thousand a year. She’s the most heartless, cold-blooded——”

And after the little ride he had pictured to himself, *solus cum solâ*, along the leafy lanes, listening to her pretty talk, so frank and yet sometimes so cynical. You can’t thoroughly enjoy the talk of a lovely damsel when it is shared by another fellow, and he a possible rival. As the old ballad says, in verse which means well, but is rugged :

“Along the way they twain did play,
The Friar and the Nun :
Ever let twain alone remain
For companie : three is none.”

But the day was bright and the sun warm, and Nelly gave him a good share of talk, so that Tom recovered his temper and came home in that good-humour which befits a Brother of Thelema.

There was no polo after luncheon, because nobody except Tom appeared anxious to play, not even the new Brother, whom Tom found, with a pang of jealousy, surrounded by the Sisters, doing Indian tricks to their unbounded delight. He made them find rings in their pocket-handkerchiefs, watches in their gloves, and bracelets in their sleeves. Then he called his Indian servant, who brought a bag of little clay balls and sat down before him playing a tum-tum, a necessary part, the conjurer explained, of his incantations. He took the little balls in his hand one after the other, and they changed into singing-birds and snakes, which worked round his wrist and made as if they would bite. Then he planted one in a flower-pot and covered it with a basket. When he took the basket off for the first time there was a tender

little plant ; when he took it off the second time there was a little tree in blossom ; and when he took it off for the third time there was a little tree in full fruit. All this was very delightful, and more delightful still when he took a sword, and vehemently smote, stabbed, and hacked his servant, who had done nothing, and therefore took no hurt. And, lastly, he covered the servant over with a big basket, and when he took that off, behold ! he was gone.

After the Indian tricks some of them went into the gardens. There was at Weyland Court a garden which had been constructed somewhere about the thirteenth century, and remained ever since untouched. It had an immensely high and thick hedge along the north and east sides. It was oblong in shape, and surrounded on all sides by two terraces. You passed by stone steps from the higher terrace to the other ; on the upper was a sun-dial, round whose face was carved a Latin inscription in old-fashioned characters ; in the middle of the garden was a fountain. It was

planted with roses and with the flowers dear to our grandmothers: wall-flowers, double stocks, sweet-williams, candytuft, and so forth. All sweet-smelling flowers, but no gaudy beds patterned in uniformity of red and blue and yellow. There were no walks, but grass grew everywhere between the beds, turf green and well kept, on which on warm mornings one might lie and bask. Low seats were here too, on which were spread cushions and soft things of rich colours which contrasted against the soft green of the turf and the splendour of the flowers. Here Miranda held to-day her five o'clock tea, and while some played lawn tennis and others practised archery, she received those who came to talk lazily, lying in the grass or sitting beneath the shade, while Cecilia sang old French songs to the accompaniment of a zither; and Nelly's merry laugh, like the ripple of a shallow brook over the pebbles, was music sweeter to one ear at least than all the harmonies that can be produced from zither or from lute.

The monastic names were a *gêne* to some ; to others the names fitted naturally. Tom Caledon, for instance, who was Brother Lancelot on days of ceremony, was more easily addressed as Tom. But Desdemona, Cecilia, and one or two others wore their names always. Nelly, to those who had not known her before, was the prettiest and most natural Rosalind in the world. There was something outlandish in Mr. Roger Exton's good-humour, quiet persistency, and cleverness which made the whole Brotherhood address him habitually as Peregrine. On the other hand, Rondelet, Alan Dunlop, and one or two others had monastic names which in a way were deceptive, so that these were seldom used. You cannot be always calling a man Hamlet, because you do not know what he will do next ; nor Parolles, not because he is a braggart, but because he is all words and talks about everything.

When the shadows of the July day began to lengthen they gradually left the garden,

and went, some driving, some walking. Tom did not take out the dog-cart that day, but strolled with Nelly in the park and beneath the glorious woods.

“If mamma knew that you were here, Tom,” she whispered, “I should be ordered home at once. What am I to say when I write? I *must* tell who is here.”

“Shall I go, Nell?”

She shook her head.

“That would spoil all. I will mention your name in the middle of all the others, instead of first, and write it quite small and drop a blot upon it. Then, perhaps, she will not notice.”

Poor Tom! Then he really was first in her mind.

“And if she says anything, why then, I will tell her you have promised to abstain from foolishness.”

“Foolishness!” echoed Tom, with a sigh. “But we are to have plenty of walks and talks together.”



CHAPTER XIV.

“ With evening came the banquet and the wine ;
The conversazione ; the duet,
Attuned by voices more or less divine.”

THE dinner-hour was half-past seven, a time fixed by Desdemona, as *Arbiter Epularum*. She said she did not want to turn night into day, and liked to have an evening. Dinner was served in the great hall, which made a noble refectory. Not only Desdemona, but one or two of the Brothers exercised steady surveillance over the *menu*, of which the great feature was that it presented every day a dinner which was not only excellent, but also composed of few courses.

“ There are,” said Desdemona, “ only two

or three countries which have any distinctive dinners. But by judicious selection of *plats* we may dine after the fashion of any country we please."

So that sometimes they dined *à la Française*, and sometimes *à l'Espagnole*, when they had Olla Podrida ; or *à l'Arabe*, when there was always a pillau ; or *à l'Inde*, when there were half-a-dozen different kinds of curry, from prawn curry, which is the king, prince, and even the emperor of all curries, down to curried vegetables ; or *à l'Allemande*, when they had things of veal with prunes ; or *à l'Anglaise*, when in addition to other good things, there was always a sirloin of beef ; or *à la Russe*, or *à l'Italienne*. As there is no cookery in America, it was impossible, save by the aid of canvas-backs, to dine *à l'Americaine*. A servant stood behind every other guest, and instead of the wine being brought round, every man named what he would take. The table was lit by wax candles only, which shed their soft light upon the flowers and silver. And all round the table stretched

the great hall itself, the setting sun still lighting up the glories of the windows, and wrapping in a new splendour the painted glass, the black beams of the roof, and the silken banners of the fraternity. When the sun was set and the day ended, the hall was very dark and black save for the table itself, the lights upon the sideboards, and, on choral nights, the lights for the musicians and the choir.

Nelly sat between Tom and Brother Peregrine, who occupied his place by right of his age in the Order, which was that of the youngest. She thought she had never before assisted at a banquet so delightful and so splendid. Opposite to her was Miranda, at whose right was Alan Dunlop, fresh from the fields, looking grave and even melancholy. Next to him, Desdemona, clad in a robe of heavy satin, looking animated and happy. There was music too, to make the feast more luxurious. The boys who sang the hymn at the Reception were there, in a sort of stage costume, and the band which played at yester-

day's ball, which was, indeed, a company brought down from London expressly for the Abbey. They played soft music, old-fashioned minuets and gavottes, music selected by Cecilia, which was not intended to fire the blood, nor lead the thoughts into melancholy channels, nor constrain the talkers to give their undivided attention to it; music of a certain gravity, as becomes dinner music, which should inspire thought, recall memories, but not be sad. And from time to time the boys threw up their fresh young voices into the air in some tuneful old part-song, which fell upon the ears of the guests, bringing a sense of coolness as from the spray of a fountain on a summer noon. Dining was no longer the satisfaction of an appetite; it became the practice of one of the fine arts. And the claret was of the softest, the hock of the most seductive, the champagne of the brightest.

For dress, the men wore a black velvet costume, designed by Desdemona herself, though I think Mr. Planché would have

recognised it. The sombre black was relieved by the collar of the Order, and the crimson rope which girded every waist. It was a dress which sat well upon men who were young and tall. The Brothers were all young and mostly tall. As for the Sisters, they wore what they pleased, and they naturally chose to wear what suited them best. But all had the collar, the hood, and girdle of the Order. Sister Desdemona surrounded her portly person with a magnificent robe of satin, in which she might have played a stage queen. Miranda had some gauzy and beautiful dress of a soft grey, and Nelly wore white.

“It is like a dream, Tom,” said the latter. “It is so splendid as to seem almost wicked. Do you think it is really a dream? Shall I wake up and find myself in Chester Square again, with mamma exhorting on the sinfulness of dancing three times with a detrimental?”

“Especially if his name is Tom Caledon,” said that Brother.

They gave one toast every evening,

which Alan, or Brother Hamlet as the Public Orator, gave without speech or ceremony.

“The Master.”

Then all rose, and murmured as they drank—

“Fay ce que voudras.”

The theatre had been built in the last century by a former Dunlop, owner of Weyland Court, after his own designs. The stage was small, but large enough for all ordinary purposes, and especially adapted for drawing-room comedy. The auditorium was semicircular, the seats being arranged so that every row was a foot-and-a-half above the one below it, like a Roman theatre. It is an admirable method for sight and hearing, but has the disadvantage of narrowing the number of the audience. The lower seats consisted of easy-chairs, in crimson velvet; the upper ones, which were given to the servants, who could bring as many of their own friends as they pleased, were padded benches, with arms and back. The house

held about a hundred and eighty or two hundred, and on evenings of performance was generally quite full. It was lit by oil lamps and wax candles only, so that the pieces were necessarily of the simpler kind, and no effects of light could ever be attempted.

Desdemona, by right of her previous profession, was naturally the stage manager. It was she who conducted the rehearsals, drilled the actors separately and together, suggested the by-play, and sometimes, if a part suited her, went on the stage herself.

The piece played to-night was a little drawing-room comedy, taken, of course, from the French : time, and therefore dress, the last century ; dialogues sparkling with cleverness, and that kind of epigram which only the French dramatists seem able to produce ; which has a point, but yet does not stab ; which disarms an enemy, but does not fell him to the ground ; which turns the laugh against him, but does not insult him—in fact, dialogues of the days

when men respected each other on account of the appeal to duels.

It was a very little after-dinner piece and took less than an hour in all, so that one rose from the amusements refreshed and not fatigued, as one generally is by a long evening at the theatre.

Then they all went back to the drawing-room. It was an old-fashioned room, very long, narrow, and low, running along a whole side of the quadrangular court; its windows opened out upon lawns; it was dimly lighted by only a few lamps and candles, and these were shaded so that the rooms would have been almost dark save for the brightly-lit conservatory at one end.

The evening was all too short. One or two of the Sisters sang and played; there was talking and, so far as Nelly's practised eye could discern, there was more than one flirtation—at least there were the usual symptoms.

Peregrine sat by her and began to talk, but his idle words jarred on the girl's ears, and seemed out of tune with the beauty of

the day and the place. She escaped, and took refuge in the conservatory, where Tom Caledon was sitting with Miranda, Desdemona, and Alan Dunlop. She noticed then how heavy and careworn the young Squire, who was also a farm labourer, was looking.

“You like the Abbey, Nell dear?” asked Miranda.

Nelly sank upon a cushion at the feet of the Abbess, and took her hand.

“It is too wonderful and delicious,” she said; “I feel as if I were in a dream. Miranda, if mamma knew the glorious time I am having here, and—and”—here she glanced at Tom—“and everything, I should be recalled like an ambassador.”

“It is a great relief to me,” said Alan, “coming over here after a rough day and finding myself among you all. My house was never put to so good a purpose before.”

“How does your public kitchen get on, Alan?” asked Miranda.

“Nothing gets on well,” he replied

gloomily. "We started very well. We had five and forty women cooking their dinners at the same time. We gave them the materials for the first day, you know—chops and steaks. Next day, when no materials were given, nobody came; and nobody has been since, except my own woman."

Miranda sighed.

"Why do you persist in going into the troublesome village, Alan?" Desdemona murmured from her chair, which was close to some heavily-scented flower, the property of which was to soothe the soul with a sense of luxury and content, and to make it irritable at the thought of struggle, discomfort, or unrest. Else Desdemona was generally the most compassionate and sympathetic of creatures. To be sure, she never could quite sympathise with Alan's schemes, and she lost her patience when she drove out and, as sometimes happened, met him in a smock-frock driving a cart in the lanes. "Why do you go into the troublesome village at all, Alan?" she

asked in such a voice as they acquire who linger too long in lands where it is always afternoon. "Come up and stay for ever here with us, in the Abbey of Thelema. Here you shall be wrapped in silk, and lulled to sleep by soft music : or you shall take your part, acting in the delightful comedies we are always devising. We will make much of you, Alan."

But he shook his head.

Then that elderly lady, intoxicated with the perfume, went on murmuring softly :

"I take my part in the play and make my points, and it is so like the stage that I look round for applause. Children, I will not be called Desdemona any more. I am in a glorified Bohemia—not the place where poets starve and artists borrow half-crowns, and both make love to milliners—but in Shakespeare's Bohemia, where Miranda is Queen, and I am one of the Ladies-in-Waiting, and this is a Palace in the City of Prague."



CHAPTER XV.

“It was a lover and a lass,
With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonino.”

“I THOUGHT, Tom, we were to be Lancelot and Rosalind in the Abbey?” said Nelly.

They were in the park, sitting under the shade of a mighty chestnut. Outside, the stillness of a hot summer noon. For once, Tom had the girl all to himself, without the lean and crows'-footed young Nabob, who persistently intruded himself upon his proposed duets with her. Quite alone, she was very pretty that morning, he thought; prettier, even, than on the evening when, with bright eyes and flushed cheeks, she danced the minuet with him in the robes of a Sister.

Perhaps a corresponding vein of thought was running through her mind, too. Girls do not, I believe, fall in love with men for their beauty, and certainly no one ever called Tom Caledon an Adonis. Adonis is generally pictured as slender, delicate, effeminate. Tom was broad-shouldered, strong of limb and sturdy. There was nothing effeminate about his short curly hair, his ruddy cheek, his swinging stride. "Tom," Nell might have said to herself, "is the best of all the men I know, and the most considerate for me. He is not so clever as Mr. Rondelet : he isn't so full of projects as Mr. Dunlop : he is not so distinguished as Brother Bayard, V.C. ; but he is the best of all the Brothers, and I wish—I wish——"

I do not know what she might have wished, because Tom began answering her questions very slowly.

"When we are together, Nell, which is not often, on account of that confounded fellow who haunts you like a shadow, we may forget the monastic names."

"It is not my fault, Tom, that we are not

oftener together. I can't *tell* people to go away and leave you and me alone, can I?"

"But you needn't encourage people," he grumbled.

"I had a letter from mamma yesterday," Nelly went on. "She has heard, she says, that a Mr. Roger Exton, who has made a large fortune in Assam, is at Weyland Court—she won't give in to calling it the Abbey—and she hints that, so long as I behave properly to Mr. Exton, she will let me go on staying here."

Tom growled.

"So you see, Tom, if you want to see anything of me, you had better make up your mind to tolerate Mr. Exton."

"Hang Mr. Exton!"

"I am sure I should not care if you did. But don't be cross, Tom. Remember you are in the Abbey of Good Temper. Besides, it is not like what you used to be in the good old days. We will be a good deal together if we can. Perhaps," she sighed, "we shall never get the chance again."

"Do you like it, Nelly," Tom asked,

“being—a good deal together I mean?” His face was not so frank and open as his companion’s.

It was a year and a day since he had put a question, similar in import, but perhaps of more special meaning, to the same young lady. It was on Ryde Pier, and in the evening, what time the summer waters of the fair Solent stretched broad and smooth on either hand, and the lights of the ships at Spithead, the yachts in the roadstead, and of Southsea five miles away, made long lines across this ocean lake; while the summer air was soft and warm; while the lazy water of the flowing tide lapped at the supports of the pier and gurgled among the planks below; while, as they two leaned side by side, looking out beyond the pier, and picturing endless happiness, the steps of those who came and went upon the pier dropped unheeded on their ears, and the music of the band was only the setting of the love-song in their hearts.

A year and a day. Did she, he asked, in faltering tones, did she like him well

enough to be always with him? No matter what answer she gave. It was what he hoped, and it filled his heart with joy unspeakable, so that the rest of that evening was spent within the gates of Paradise.

Well, it is a very pleasant place to visit even for a single night, and the memory of it lingers and is a happiness to dwell upon. But, unfortunately, these visits never last long, and in Tom's case he was promptly expelled by a person who, somehow, had the guardianship of his Paradise. The angel with the flaming sword in this instance took the form of the young lady's mamma. She was a person of commanding presence, great power of speech, trained by long battle with her late lamented warrior-spouse to use winged words like sharp arrows, and, being herself poor and of good family, filled with ambitious hopes for her daughter, so lovely and so sweet. Therefore, when Tom confessed that his income was under seven hundred a year, and that he had no prospects to speak of, or prospects of the vaguest and most un-

reliable character, Mrs. Despard allowed wrath to get the better of politeness, and let Tom have it. He must never, under any circumstances, speak of such a thing again. She was surprised, she was more than surprised, she was deeply hurt, at what she could call nothing but a breach of confidence. She had trusted him with her daughter, feeling sure that she was safe with one who had known her from infancy. With his means, his very humble means, the matter was ridiculous and not to be thought of for a moment. Did he know the expenses of housekeeping? Did he know the cost of bringing up a family? Had he thought that her daughter, her Eleanor, was to become a common household drudge?—And, finally, she must wish Mr. Caledon good morning—for ever. Henceforward they were to meet as strangers.

So Tom found himself outside the door. It was a facer. And there was no help for it. The energetic widow followed up her onslaught by a letter, in which she said

that she should feel more at her ease in Ryde if Tom was out of it; and that, if he did not see his way to changing his quarters, she should be obliged to sacrifice the rooms which she had taken for two months at eight guineas a week.

So poor Tom had to go, packed up his portmanteau, and went mooning about by himself on the Continent. He did not enjoy himself much till he came to the Engadine, which was full of Rugby and Marlborough masters, so that the contemplation of their great superiority, and the listening to their artless prattle, soothed his soul and made him think of Mr. Rondelet; the man in whom Alan Dunlop believed.

A year and a day: and here he was again at the Pearly Gates, and no infuriated mamma as yet in sight.

“Do you like it, being a good deal together?” he asked ungrammatically.

“Yes,” she replied frankly and without the least hesitation. “Haven’t I told you so, over and over again? Men will never

believe what one says. Does it please you, Tom, to hear me say it again? I do like it then; I like it very much; I like it too much for my peace of mind, Tom. Will that do?"

"Oh, Nelly!" cried the enraptured lover.

"I like being with you better than with anybody else, man, woman, or child, in the whole world. I am sure it ought to be so. You have known me so long that you are a kind of brother by this time."

"Brother! oh!" Tom groaned.

"Which reminds me"—her manner changed suddenly. While she confessed her "liking" for Tom's society, her face was glowing, and her eyes were soft and tearful. She was very near having a weak moment, only that stupid Tom was afraid, and let the opportunity for a bit of real love-making go by. "Which reminds me," she said, suddenly putting on a careless and even a flippant air, "that there are certain things which cannot be talked about."

"Why not, Nelly?"

“Because they are impossible things; yes, Tom; quite—quite. Isn’t there a rule that the Brothers are not to say foolish things to the Sisters?”

“No rule of the kind at all,” he said. “In fact I was never in a country-house where so many foolish things are said. To be sure the place is full of charming girls.”

“And of course you find it easy to say foolish things to all of them,” she said with the least little delicate shade of real jealousy.

“Don’t, Nelly; you know well enough.” Tom was again ungrammatical, but perfectly intelligible.

“This is a world, Tom, as mamma says, in which common sense is wanted. You have only got seven hundred a year. I have got—nothing. Can we—could we—does anybody live on seven hundred a year?”

“I believe Dunlop is living on eighteen shillings a week,” Tom replied. “But we could, Nelly. I have calculated it all out on paper, and we really could. And you should have a horse to ride as well.”

“And a season in town; and a run down to Brighton; and perhaps six weeks on the Continent; and you to have your club and hunter—oh! and my dress, because mamma has always said that she should not consider it her duty to help me after I was married. Tom, *can* we do all this on seven hundred a year? Ask your heart, as they say on the stage.”

Tom was silent for a few moments.

“But we need not want all this, Nell. We could live somehow where things are cheap—beef at twopence, and potatoes free—you know; and we would be”—here he looked queer—“we would be economical, Nell.”

She burst out into a merry laugh.

“You are a ridiculous boy, Tom. How *could* we be economical? Isn't the life we lead the only life we can lead with any pleasure? And are you not a most extravagant man? How much do you owe?”

“One can't be very extravagant on seven hundred a year,” said Tom with a sigh. “And to think that you of all girls are

ready to throw yourself away for money—oh, Nell !”

“ Tom, I’ve heard that kind of thing said in novels and in plays, over and over again, but you know in real life it is silly. Lord Methusalem marries little artless Lily, and then the satirists talk about it as if it were so awful for Lily. Why, Tom, she isn’t artless at all ; she likes it. She knows perfectly well what she is doing. Am I artless, do you think ?”

“ You look artless, Nelly.”

“ You know very well, then, that my looks are a snare. I never had any secrets from you, Tom, had I ? Who knows better than you that I must marry, if I marry at all, a rich man ; and the richer the better ? I suppose that men are not necessarily brutes and bears because they are rich. Why, there is Alan Dunlop ; he is rich and not a brute ; and half-a-dozen of the Brothers ; and lots of others that I know. I really do not see why a rich man should not be as pleasant as a poor one, though he never is in the novels. My husband must

be rich, and I only hope with all my heart that he will be pleasant."

"But it's such a mercenary—I mean—you know what I mean."

"I know, Tom," said Nell. "If we could do just whatever we liked, there is nothing I should like better than to say 'yes' to you—just as I did on the dear old pier; you know that, Tom, don't you?—and go straight away to church, you and I together. Oh! how happy I should feel while the clergyman tied the knot! And what a rage mamma would be in! But that is all nonsense. We are born in a rank of life, as the Catechism says, and have to be contented therewith. That is, I suppose, we must accept our fate and make the best of it. And my fate is—not Tom Caledon—poor old Tom!—but somebody or other—Lord Methusalem perhaps. And don't think I shall be miserable and die of a broken heart! I shall do nothing of the kind. I shall make a fair bargain. I shall marry a man who will give me a good income, a position, kindness, and—"

and—perhaps—what *you* make such a fuss about, Tom”—here she turned red and hesitated, picking at a flower—“what they call—Love. And I shall give him all I have got to give—all any woman can give—myself.” She stopped for a moment, and seemed as if she were trying to collect her thoughts. “And it will be a bargain all to my advantage.”

“What, Nell? A man gets *you*, and you think it is a bargain to your advantage?”

“Ah! Tom, you think that girls are artless, you see. That is the mistake that men make. My dear Tom, we are miracles of common sense and prudence.”

Tom pulled the most dismal face in the world.

“Don’t, Tom.” Nelly laughed and then sighed. “Don’t. It’s hard enough as it is, not being able to—to have one’s own way. You might at least help me.”

“I will, Nell. I declare I will. I promise you that I will not ask impossible things—as you call them. But you must give me something for my promise. You

must walk with me, dance with me, and ride with me."

"I will do all that," said Nelly. "But, Tom, you must not be angry if I—flirt with anybody I like among the Brothers of the Order."

"I suppose," said Tom ruefully, "that I have no right to say a word, whatever you do. And there are plenty of men here for you to flirt with; and I suppose I shan't have a chance of edging in a word at all,"

"Certainly not, if it is a disagreeable word," she said.

Tom got up.

"There *must* be something wrong in the management of the world," he said, "when two people like you and me, who are made for each other, can't be married for want of a few miserable dollars. Why, Nell, can you conceive of anything jollier than for you and me to be always together, to do what we like, go where we like, and live as we please? Do you think you would get tired of me? To be sure I am not clever."

She shook her head; something like a

tear came in her eye, and she did not look up.

“I should never get tired of you, Tom. It is the men who get tired of their wives, not the women of their husbands.”

“I wonder, now,” said Tom, “whether I couldn’t go in for something and make money. There was MacIntyre of ours, I remember. He went into the Advertising Agency business, and told somebody, who told me, that he was making a thousand a year over it. And there was another man who went into wine on Commission. And another who took to writing. And Tom Bellows went into manure.”

“And I hope he stuck there,” said Nelly. “Oh! Tom, to think that you will ever make anything. You? There’s another point of resemblance between us, Tom, that we are both born to spend, not to save. It is a much happier condition of life. And now let us go home for luncheon. Is not that Peregrine coming to meet us?”

“I thought he couldn’t let us alone very long,” growled Tom.



CHAPTER XVI.

“ So many hours must I tend my flock,
So many hours must I take my rest,
So many hours must I contemplate,
So many hours must I sport myself.”

AFTER nearly a year of continual effort in the village, it was almost time that some results should be arrived at. And yet the young Reformer's countenance grew darker every day as he looked about for what should have been the fair and smiling harvest of his toil, and found only the same old weeds. Every one of his projected reforms had been by this time fairly commenced. The Parliament—the plan of which he had hoped to widen, so as to make it embrace the broad interests of the whole village instead of the compa-

ratively narrow business of a single farm—was a House of empty benches. On the suppression of the gratuitous supper the rustics ceased to take any further interest in the proceedings. A show of a weekly conference was held, it is true, but it was like the Roman Senate under the Empire, having no power, and being the mere shadow of a name. It consisted, indeed, entirely of a duet between Alan Dunlop, himself, and his bailiff. Perhaps, now and then, the two young men of religious principle who had charge of the Co-operative shop and the Good Liquor Bar, put in a silent appearance. Occasionally, as has already been stated, the meetings were attended by the saturnine schoolmaster. He showed little enthusiasm for a movement which brought no good to himself. The cobbler of anti-religious sympathies abstained after his first visit. If you could not discuss Atheism, what was the good of Parliament? He considered all this talk of farm work sheer waste of time, which might much better be devoted to

the destruction of Christianity, monarchy, and the aristocracy—to parcelling out the land and introducing communism. One night the young man they called William came and proposed, with greater liberty of expression than might have been expected of him, a vote for the increase of wages and the decrease of hours, which he supported on the plea that it would afford the labourers time to attend the night-school and the reading-room. But Mr. Bostock made short work of him, so that he came no more. Still the Parliament was kept up, and Prudence Driver entered the minutes regularly, acting as Clerk of the House. Also, Alan always introduced his new ideas first to the House, and then circulated them in the form of tracts.

In the course of the year quite an extensive literature of tracts grew up in the village, all written entirely by the Squire, and most generously given away for the exclusive use of the people. Among them were—

The Tract on the Co-operation of Em-

ployer and Labourer, with a Tentative Conjecture on the share which the latter ought to have in the Profits. This was the treatise presented to the first sitting of the Parliament, but as it was unfortunately mistaken for paper provided as pipe-lights, it became immediately out of print. I believe a copy is now as rare as an Editio Princeps of *Gargantua*.

The *Tract on Total Abstinence* which followed, produced the results which such tracts always do. The women got hold of it and quoted figures. Then came domestic disagreements, and the men, to escape nagging, went to the *Spotted Lion*, where they agreed on the merits of the Tract, and wondered why no one followed the Squire's example. But the weekly chalks did not grow less.

The *Tract on the Good Liquor League* obtained an accidental importance from the fact that the landlord of the *Spotted Lion* thought it was meant as an attack upon himself, particularly when the writer spoke unkindly of treacle, salt, and sugar as addi-

tions to beer which ought not to be made. Otherwise this Tract would certainly have fallen flat.

In the same way the *Tract on Co-operation in the Village shop* met with no readers except the one village shopkeeper. She, like the landlord of the *Spotted Lion*, resented its appearance as aimed directly at herself and her own interests. But her weekly lists of tick did not diminish.

The *Tract on Cleanliness in the Home* was kindly and even cheerfully received by the men. They snorted, chuckled, and grinned, wondering what the women would say to it. Their wives, however, thought the Squire had best keep to subjects more proper to man-folk, and spoke disrespectfully about meddlers, even throwing out hints on the subject of dish-clouts.

The *Tract on Art in Common Life* was, as Alan felt himself, a little above their heads. The beautiful language regarding Common Things, the Blade of Grass, the Tuft of Moss, the common wild flowers,

and the singing of the lark in the sky, fell unresponsive on their hearts.

The Tract which recommended daily bathing was received with an apathetic silence which left no room for doubt as to the opinion of the village.

The Tract about Free Libraries and a Public Reading-room was considered to concern other people. Probably it had been printed and given out at their doors by mistake. The villagers, anxious not to think their Squire a madman, charitably put this down as the postman's error.

The *Tract on Amusements* excited surprise rather than curiosity. They were to dance every week—dancing was an Art strange and forgotten. They were to have a theatre—they had never seen a theatre—and a circus, and a band of music, and to go out all together for holidays. Like the boys and girls, which was degrading.

The *Tract on the Model Cottage*, showing how the garden and the pigsty paid the rent and provided the Sunday dinner of beef and cabbage, with the pudding under

the gravy; excited aspirations which were as fleeting as vague, and were speedily drowned in beer. It may be confessed that not one single cottage grasped the idea that roast beef and Yorkshire pudding were attainable objects.

The great difficulty was that nobody wanted to read—nobody wanted to change—nobody wanted to improve. The duty of discontent had not been taught these simple rustics. It was sad for Alan to hear in the evening those voices of the real village Parliament raised in clamorous cheerfulness in their taproom which were silent at his own Assemblies; it was sad to feel that his tracts fell unheeded on dull and contented ears; it was sad to meet the Vicar and acknowledge that, so far, he had done no better from his cottage than his reverence from his pulpit; or the Vicar's daughters, who respected him mightily and were unfeignedly sorry to learn how things did not advance a bit, and how the only purchasers at the Co-operative shop were themselves and Miss Dalmeny. Perhaps

the failure of his shop and his bar was the saddest thing about the whole experiment, because, in establishing them he had, as he told Miranda, appealed to the very lowest principle, that of self-interest. Could people be so stupid as not to be alive to their own interest? Both the excellent young Christians who resided together and administered shop and bar stood, all day long, at the receipt of custom with brightly varnished beer-handles and polished counters, but had no custom. And yet the tea was good and the sugar good; and the beer was the bright and sparkling fluid from Burton, not the sugary mess of the *Spotted Lion*.

For this stiffnecked generation took kindly to nothing except what was actually given to them. As long as soap was distributed the mothers came to the Public Laundry. When they had to bring their own soap, they preferred the seclusion of home. The men, for their part, gave a ready patronage to the Bar so long as the tap ran free, which was for the first week.

During that blissful period every man was allowed a pint in the evening. By this it was intended to cultivate the village palate into a taste for real beer. The pint despatched, it was mournful to see them slouch across the road and enter their accustomed taproom.

It was almost as painful to visit the Library where Prudence Driver sat every evening alone. Now and then, perhaps, the schoolmaster might look in to borrow a book and exchange gloomy remarks with her. Then he would go out, and the door would bang behind him, and the girl would sit by herself wondering *why* people preferred to be ignorant, and endeavouring to master the principles by which her Prophet was guided. Once the shoemaker, already referred to, came with a list of books beginning with Toland and Volney, and ending with Renan. As none of these works were in the Library, he explained to Prudence that she was an accomplice in the great conspiracy, of which every king, priest, and holder of property was a member,

for keeping the people in ignorance. It is impossible, however, to satisfy everybody, and when the Primitive Methodist minister of the circuit visited the Library and found the works of certain modern philosophers upon the shelves, he asked the librarian whether she realised the possession of a soul, and whether she knew of the punishment allotted to those who wilfully disseminate error. So that it seemed as if nobody was pleased. But the girl had her consolations. Sometimes Mr. Dunlop himself would sit in the reading-room all the evening, and now and then he talked with her over his plans. Sometimes Miss Miranda would call at the Library in the afternoon. And sometimes the young ladies from the Vicarage would come in and run round the shelves like butterflies, brightening up the place. Otherwise Prudence Driver's life was a dull one.

The Public Laundry and Bath-houses were as deserted as the Library.

After the work of nearly a whole year, was there nothing ?

Yes; one thing there was. When the Squire, at vast expense, hired a whole circus company and had performances open to all the people—just as if they had been so many ancient Romans—for nothing, they appreciated the act at its highest possible value. Never was any performer more popular than the clown. And yet, in spite of the temporary popularity which accrued to him by reason of the circus, Alan did not feel altogether as if the success of this experiment was a thing, to the student of the Higher Culture, altogether to be admired. It was much as if a great tragedian were to step suddenly, and by no conscious will of his own, into the position of a popular Tom Fool.

Keenly conscious of this, Alan next got a company of comedians. They were going about the country playing a piece which had been popular in London. It was not a great piece, not a play of that lofty ideal which Alan would have preferred to set before his people, but it was something better than the clown's perform-

ance. On the first night the villagers came in a body. They expected another clown. What they saw was a set of men and women in ordinary costume, carrying on and talking just like so many ladies and gentlemen. That was not acting at all. No real interest in it; no red-hot poker; no tumbling down and dislocating limbs; no spectacle of discomfiture and suffering such as calls forth at once the mirth of the rustic mind. The next night nobody came but a few children. Clearly, the dramatic instinct was as yet but feeble.

About this time Alan had a great consultation. It was in Desdemona's "cell,"—a luxurious apartment at the Abbey—on Sunday afternoon. Those who were present at the Conference were Desdemona herself, Miranda, Tom Caledon—who was rather short of temper in consequence of discovering that Nelly had gone for a walk with Mr. Roger Exton—Mr. Rondelet, and Alan himself.

The Abbey was very quiet that afternoon; the drowsy influence of the mid-

summer day lay upon all, and made them talk languidly and dreamily.

“After a year of work,” said Alan, lying back in his chair and speaking to the ceiling, “there is nothing.” He raised himself and addressed Miranda. “I told you, Miranda, at the very outset, that Habit was the great enemy. I begin almost to believe that nothing can be done against that deadly enemy.”

Then Mr. Rondelet, standing by the open window, toyed delicately with his eye-glass which he half raised twice, and as often dropped. I really believe that he could see as well without it. Then he stroked his smooth cheek and smiled languidly.

“You have proclaimed,” he said . . . there was always a little difficulty about Mr. Rondelet’s *r*’s, which had a tendency—a tendency only, not a brutal determination—to run themselves into *w*’s. Mankind are divided in opinion as to whether this is affectation or a congenital infirmity . . . “You have proclaimed,” he said, “the respon-

sibilities of wealth. You have set an example which may be followed and must be quoted."

"It will be quoted," said Tom Caledon, who was sitting by Desdemona. "It will be quoted most certainly, but as for being followed——"

"I have made an experiment," said Alan, "in what I believe to be the right method. But the success has not been, I confess, altogether what I could desire. It seems almost impossible to enter into their minds."

"Perhaps," murmured Desdemona gently—"Perhaps, Alan, they haven't any."

"And perhaps," said Mr. Rondelet, "there is still something to be said in favour of the old method of imposing obedience and laying down rules. Our ancestors assumed to possess what *we* certainly do possess—the Higher Intelligence."

"That is driving, not leading," said Alan. "My principle is the Example. It was an old Oxford principle, Rondelet."

Miranda observed with a sigh, that she

had hoped to see some development in the direction of Art.

It was an unfortunate remark, because the failure of the Picture Gallery was the most conspicuous of all Alan's late defeats. No one, after the first day, cared to go into the Picture Gallery at all.

"I hoped," said Alan, "that we should make the gallery into a sort of silent and continuous educator. That series of pictures showing the development of manhood from the flint-weaponed savage to—to——" here he looked at the Fellow of Lothian College—"to the highest product of modern civilisation, I thought would become at once a stimulus to the discontent I want to engender."

"Even the contemplation of the—the Highest Modern Product failed to interest them?" asked Mr. Rondelet, with a show of carelessness as if he did not know that in the neglect of the Highest Modern Product he had himself been neglected.

"Yes; they took no interest in the progress of civilisation. Then I had a series

to illustrate the History of England. But they cared nothing about the History of England."

"There were the dances," said Miranda, joining in the chorus of lamentation. "Oh! I did hope that something would come of the dances. A weekly dance, with an inexpensive supper—a real dance—of quadrilles and waltzes for the people. It seemed so delightful. And to think that we should break down from such a trifling cause as boots."

"Did they," asked Desdemona, languidly, "did they try to waltz in the boots of their working hours?"

"Well," said Miranda, "the fact is we forgot that detail. On the first night Tom was good enough to give us his assistance. But there was only one girl, Alma Bostock, who could be made to go round at all, and she being the daughter of the Bailiff, is, I suppose, a little above the rest. Dancing is extinct among the English peasantry. It is a lost art."

"Begin again next winter," said Des-

demonia. "Provide plenty of thin shoes, and I will go down and teach them how to dance."

"You must give them a supper, too," Miranda said, "otherwise they will certainly not come. They are like little children, who must be approached by the temptation of something to eat."

"The night-school has to be shut now, Miranda," continued Alan gloomily. "We have been going on for some time with a single pupil, Prudence Driver's brother. I have reason to believe that she bribed him into attendance, and that, as she is at the end of her resources, he refuses to attend any longer."

"Then," said Tom, "as you have gone quite through the whole of your projects, and they are all dead failures, I suppose you are ready to come back to civilisation again."

"And own to failure?" Alan replied. "Not yet. The last word has not been spoken."

Then Mr. Rondelet, leaning against the

open window-frame and letting his white fingers roam daintily about his smooth cheek, spoke low and in a certain measured accent, as if the warmth and sunshine of the afternoon had entered into his soul.

“You have shown the way, Dunlop. You have taken the place which an Oxford man of our school was bound to take. You have illustrated what *should* be and what *will* be, perhaps, in the fulness of days. You have also shown how immeasurably in advance of the age is that school to which you belong. The common herd now know what it is—the Higher Life. You have done, we think,”—he spoke as if he was in himself the Common Room of *Lothian*—“enough for honour. In the centuries to come the tale will not be allowed to drop and be forgotten. It will grow and spread from this little centre of Weyland village till it becomes a great mythus. In the course of the generations, antiquaries will be trying to trace back your legend to the far more remote birth

of the Sun-God Fable, and the allegories of Vishnu, Moses, Tammuz, and Apollo. It will be demonstrated that Alan Dunlop's history, as preserved in a fragmentary condition, was an allegory, constructed slowly, and bit by bit, of the progress of the year. You will be relegated to the præhistoric period. Treatises will be written to show that your *cultus* existed before Homer, and is referred to in the Iliad; that it was a branch of the great Aryan family of tradition, in spite of the inevitable German scholar who will try to make you out Semitic. And with all the talk no one will be able quite clearly to separate you from Hercules, Samson, or Apollo. You are doomed to become præ-historic. Round your name will gather proverbs, sayings, legends, and miracles. You will be accepted, and even worshipped as the Founder of a new religion; men will dispute first on the genuineness of the miracles, then on the authenticity of the records; and lastly, on the broad fact whether you ever really existed or not. In

fact, I see very well and clearly prophesy that everybody in the future will have to become Dunlopians or Anti-Dunlopians, and a High Place for your Worship will be set up in the village of Weyland. So far, at least, you have succeeded."

Desdemona clapped her hands, and even Miranda, who was not always pleased with Mr. Rondelet's remarks, laughed. Alan alone did not seem to appreciate the fullness of the glory prophesied.

"Another thing you have done," said Tom, the practical, "is that, with your extra three shillings a week for your farm-labourers and your free feeds, the whole village has grown fat. I met two men yesterday, once thin, who positively waddle. They now bear before them, like an alderman——"

"And your festivals, Alan," asked Miranda. "Did the last go off well?"

Alan hesitated for a moment.

"So far as the children were concerned," he said, "we got on very well. The Vicar was there, with the girls, and we amused

them. The women were less easy to please, and I am sorry to say that, owing to some confusion about the orders for beer, the men all got drunk. We left them behind, lying on the roadside in different stages of intoxication."

"It will be reported," said Mr. Rondelet, "in the *mythos*, that the young god was such that those men who gazed upon his face fell to the earth instantly, as if they were drunken with new wine: but that the women followed him singing hymns."

"We went to Weyland Priory," said Alan, unheeding. "I lectured in the ruins, but who knows with what result?"

There was silence for a space. And then Mr. Rondelet left the open window and sought a chair which stood in the midst of the group, just as if it had been left there for the Master. And laying his chin upon his left hand, in such wise that the fore-finger and the second finger were parted and lay on either side of his mouth, and sitting so that the elbow of the left

arm rested on the chair, he spoke slowly :

“I have brought myself to think, notwithstanding all the talk we had in Oxford, when we were younger men, Dunlop, that the great men—the giants—of the Renaissance were right in leaving the common herd to their own devices. They lived like gods, apart, and enjoyed by themselves the true pleasures of the Higher Culture.”

This Fellow of Lothian could never utter a dozen sentences without lugging in the Higher Culture.

“Had they gone below, had they tried to improve, to change the vulgar crowd, they would have lost the cream and glory of life. In these days there is again a small school of Humanists—chiefly or wholly sprung from Oxford—of whom the world knows little. Therefore we live by ourselves. Shall we not, then, live *for* ourselves? Perhaps fate—the gods—chance—may throw in the way of one or two”—he looked, perhaps accidentally, at

Miranda—"a companion, a woman, whose social and æsthetic taste may be our own, and whose lines of Culture may be the same. What more delightful life may be imagined than an atmosphere of art among a little circle, from which all ignoble people will be excluded, all contact with the uncultivated hedged out? This Abbey of Thelema partially, but only partially"—here he looked at Tom Caledon, as if that young man marred with his broad shoulders and stalwart figure the delicate effeminacies of his ideal—"only partially, I say, realises my ideal. So hedged in, our lives would become first a mystery and then an example to the admiring world; and in this way Culture would be helped by emulation. This, however, Dunlop, is a different method from yours. What do you think, Miss Dalmeny?"

"Your method seems to me the highest form of selfishness," she replied.

"But to return to your project, Alan," said Desdemona. "Are you quite sure that you began in the right way?"

“ I still think so,” he said. “ The fault is with me, not with my method.”

“ Everybody who has a method thinks that,” said Tom Caledon. “ I like having none, and using the world as I find it.”

“ The clown of to-day,” said Desdemona, “ is the clown of yesterday and of to-morrow. But if you really hope to make any change you must begin with the children. And for that purpose you want a woman’s help. You must have a wife, Alan.”

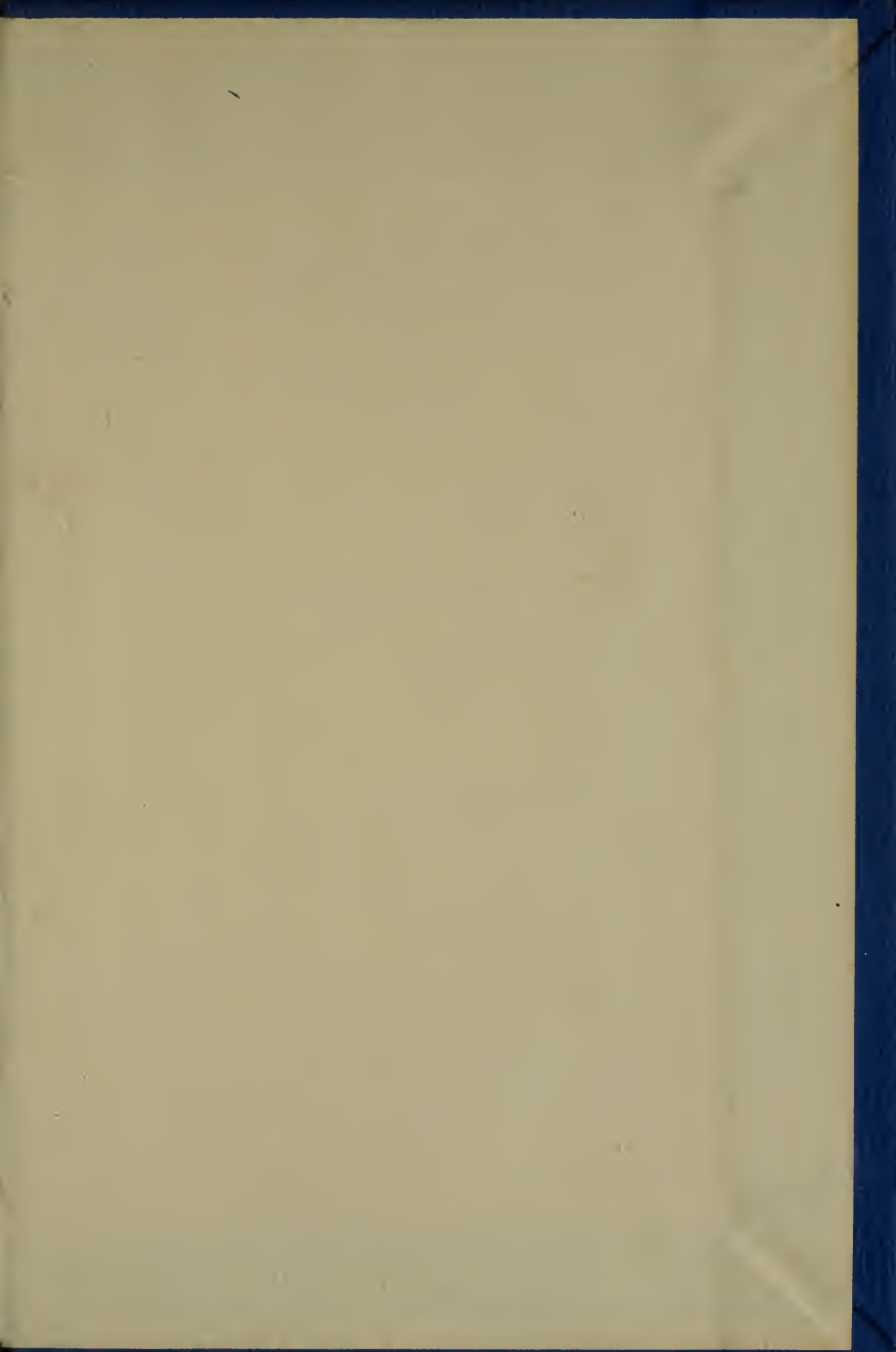
He gazed intently upon his adviser for a few moments, and was silent. And presently they began to talk about other things, and the church bells rang out pleasantly beyond the park, making the soft air of the summer day melodious. And the three men all fell to thinking about the same subject, each from a different point of view. For Tom was in love, and wanted to carry that sentiment to a legitimate conclusion by marriage; and Alan was in earnest, and thought to complete his

experiment by marriage ; and Mr. Rondelet was in debt, and wanted to clear off his liabilities, and make himself free from similar annoyances for the future, by marriage.

END OF VOL I.







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